

THE VERMILION GATE

A Novel of a Far Land

by

LIN YUTANG



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE CHARACTERS OF THIS NOVEL ARE FICTIONAL. LIKE ALL characters in fiction, they are often from real life, but are composites. Let no one arrogate to himself the presumption that he is the original of this or that war-lord, adventurer, cheat or roué. It is quite all right if some woman imagines that she knew this or that society lady or charming concubine, or even that she had the same experience herself.

The events in Chinese Turkestan are, however, authentic, and the personages in the historical background are given their real names: General Tso Tsungtang, the great statesman who first colonised Sinkiang with Chinese soldiers and their wives; Yakub Beg, who led the great Moslem Rebellion of 1864-1878; Yollbars Khan, minister to the deposed King of Hami; Governor Chin Shujen, who was later driven away from Urumchi by his White Russian regiment and tried and shot in Nanking; the Manchurian General Sheng Shih-tsai, who succeeded Chin and became a legend himself; the fabulous young Tungan general Ma Chungying, who tried to create a Central Asia Moslem Empire across Turkestan and who was last seen crossing over to the Soviet border in the company of Constantinoff, the Soviet Consul of Kashgar, at the end of 1934. The Moslem revolt of 1931-34 is recorded in first-hand witness reports, such as Sven Hedin's *Big Horse's Flight* and Aitchén K. Wu's *Turkestan Tumult*. Of this revolt, the novel covers only the year 1913.

L.Y.T.

***Within the vermilion gate, meats and wines go to waste
While on the roadside lie the frozen bodies of the poor.***

—Tu Fu

CONTENTS

BOOK I THE HOUSE OF TAFUTI

1

BOOK II THE MANCHURIAN GUEST

77

BOOK III SUNGANOR

137

BOOK IV THE DISOWNED

219

BOOK V LANCHOW

275

BOOK VI THE RETURN

336

Book I

THE HOUSE OF TAFUTI

1

LI FEI SAT AT AN INSIDE TABLE IN THE TEA-HOUSE, LOOKING OUT on the broad street and the shops beyond. Directly opposite the tea-house was a big shop selling silks and cotton piece goods. The February weather was cold, the day had been windy, and the heavily padded door screen was let down. To the right stood a mutton restaurant. The front of the restaurant was entirely open in summer, but in the cold season it was enclosed with a partition and doors whose upper parts were fitted with glass panels permitting a view of the people inside.

Gusts of wind swept up the dry dust from the pathway, which mule-carts had cut into deep grooves. On rainy days the water, unable to escape into the open drain between the pathway and the macadamised main road, turned the dust in the old mule-cart path into a muddy paste, while on sunny days the slightest breeze churned the dust and blew it in the faces of passers-by. The mule-carts, by force of tradition, still travelled on these pathways and avoided the paved road in the centre. It might be that they had been forbidden to use the centre roadway. It might also be that the cart-drivers, having driven on the mud path all their lives, just went on doing so. The street was forty feet wide. Why had the city authorities paved only the centre? Li Fei's mind always asked questions. Perhaps it would cost too much to pave the entire road. Perhaps, too, the authorities believed that mule-carts were ordained by nature to travel on mud. Their big wooden wheels, banded with metal, might loosen the embedded cut rocks and so spoil the road for the motor-cars and the rickshaws. It looked like a half-done job and it kept the two or three inches of dust on the pathway

and made the city dirty. He did not like it. He did not like anything half done.

His mind was not on this particular problem just now. He had grown up in the ancient city of Si-an, was proud of it and wanted to see the city improved and modernised. He had taken a great interest in seeing it change under his eyes as he grew up. He remembered his keen excitement when in his school days he saw the main north-south thoroughfare lighted with electricity for the first time. The creation of the Central Park, the introduction of a few paved roads and rubber-wheeled rickshaws and motor-cars aroused in him a mild excitement. He saw some foreigners—chiefly missionaries of the Lutheran Mission, doctors and teachers, and often enough long-legged European tourists or engineers walking in their trousers and shirt-sleeves, their faces looking like half-cooked beef. He often speculated on the origin of that beefy complexion.

He had seen the sedate ancient city, the famed capital of the Tang emperors, change hesitantly, unwillingly, but perceptibly. Si-an was far inland, in the heart of China's north-west. He called it 'The Anchor of China's Conservatism'. It was his home town and he loved everything connected with it. Si-an would not change gracefully. The changes in men and morals, government and costumes, meant chaos and confusion. He loved this big, buzzing confusion.

Now he heard a band playing and wondered what it was. It was a Friday and not a holiday. He moved towards the door to see better. A police band was marching past, and behind it a long procession of students was marching up the Tungtachieh. This street had been officially re-christened Chungshan, in honour of Sun Yat-sen, whose honorific name was Chungshan. To the local populace, however, it was still the Tungtachieh, or East Main Street. Some busybody, a young Kuomintang zealot, had written to the newspaper and proposed that anybody heard to refer to the Sun Yat-sen Street as East Main Street should be fined by the police. It did not work. The policemen themselves continued to call it Tungtachieh, except in their official reports.

Li Fei peered down the street. It was a moving spectacle. The dust was blowing in the students' faces, but the sun was also shining on them. There were big horizontal bands of white cloth, carried high on poles, and the students carried in their

hands paper flags flapping in the wind with brave slogans on them. 'Support the Nineteenth Route Army!' 'Let the Nation be United!' 'For War with Japan!' 'Remember September the Eighteenth!' This was a demonstration of support for the Nineteenth Route Army fighting Japan in that abbreviated war in 1932 which did not come off.

Li Fei's heart was cheered, especially at the sight of the police band. It meant that the city was solidly behind the students. He had heard of police fighting the students in Peking.

He stopped outside the door. The students' faces were bright and smiling in the sun. The procession was somewhat disorderly, but that did not matter. Crowds lined the street to watch the procession, chattering gaily. There were young children, too, from the primary schools. Each group was preceded by a banner with the name of the school. A troop of boy scouts, their scout uniforms bulging over heavy underclothes to keep them warm, attracted the most attention with their fifes and kettle-drums. A middle-school group marched past with a boy beating an oil-can, and the bystanders laughed.

One group consisted of students from the Girls' Normal College. Most of the girls appeared in their winter clothes, but in front marched a dozen girls, their hair bobbed, wearing white blouses and black bloomers and cloth shoes. They were the volley-ball team. The sight of their white feminine legs caused a few old women to cover their faces with their hands.

"Shamed to death! Such big girls not wearing pants!" one of them said.

The men, shop employees and young loafers in the streets, gaped. It was all somewhat topsy-turvy—like modern China itself—a confusing picture of the old and the new.

Li Fei turned his steps and followed the procession with the girl students. He liked the noise, the band, the sun in the students' faces, the boy scouts, the oil-can. Young China was marching on, confused but hopeful. He felt the same gurgle of excitement inside as when he had seen a motor-car whizzing on East Main Street for the first time.

The girls were laughing and giggling. A few older girls seemed to have difficulty following the procession in high-heeled shoes, and they were shy while they weakly shouted the slogans with the rest. He liked that, too. But most of the girls were young,

between seventeen and twenty. Their bobbed hair, their laughing faces, and the variety of woollen mufflers, mostly deep red, were beautiful to see. Now and then a gust of cold wind blew their hair up against their faces from behind, and the dust swirled up in the street and blew into their eyes. Some of them held their mufflers against their noses, and some coughed. Their tresses and curls fluffing looked like prairie grass in the wind.

Li Fei was the Si-an correspondent for a national newspaper, the *Sinkungpao*. He followed the procession not because he was a correspondent but simply because he was interested. He felt that something amusing was sure to happen. It would be a miracle if something did not happen to the procession, if all went on smoothly and uneventfully.

The police captain, who had patriotically contributed the brass band, was himself a young man who was all in favour of war with Japan. This did not mean necessarily that the police department of the city approved. As a matter of fact, Si-an was the capital of the province, and the governor, a semi-literate warlord, had heard there was to be a student demonstration and had telephoned to the police commissioner, who was his brother-in-law, to break it up.

The procession had come round the south-eastern corner of the Manchu City, as it was called, because here, in Empire days, the governor and his Manchu guards had lived, and here the Empress Dowager had stayed when she fled from the Allied European troops during the Boxer uprising.

Li Fei saw lined up at the entrance of an alley a group of policemen, between thirty and fifty of them, armed with long bamboo poles. The police brass band had gone some fifty yards ahead beyond the bend. A whistle blew and policemen rushed out from several alley-ways, shouting "Ho! ho! ho!" and charging at the students.

Li Fei drew back a little and watched with his arms folded across his chest. Extraordinary, he thought to himself. The clacking of their poles and the cries of "Ho! ho! ho!" sounded as if they were chasing ducks.

Soon began a ludicrous and mock-heroic battle. You couldn't be killed by a bamboo pole, and the students had a great time of it. Some of the students grabbed the ends of the poles, and then it became a tug-of-war, neither side willing to let go. One

pole was seen to spring and somersault twenty feet into the air. Many of the poles were split and splintered, and these were more dangerous, causing scratches that bled. There was a great deal of mauling, pricking, pulling, tugging, wrestling, and kicking in close fights. The dust blinded the eyes of both parties. On the whole, the students felt wonderful, and the policemen miserable and ludicrous.

The students from the Girls' Normal School had drawn up at the corner when the fracas started. They could not move on and they would not turn back.

A few policemen now turned towards them.

"Let's go for the girls!"

"No."

"Of course. We have orders to break up the demonstration. Won't it be fun?"

"Let's rout the Niangtsechun (Amazons)!"

A group of ten or twelve young men rushed towards the girls. "Ho! ho! ho!" On they came with their long poles, whole and splintered.

The girls screamed and turned to flee. The sight of the plump white calves of the volley-ball team was irresistible.

It must be said for these policemen that inside their uniforms they were young men. It must be said for them also that men in uniform in a large unit often do strange things that they would not do outside their uniforms and individually. Moreover, a policeman, if he was a good one, had an instinct to chase anyone who fled. Many of them had never had the privilege of talking with a college girl, not to speak of being officially charged with the duty of chasing them, grabbing their bodies, snatching flags from their white arms, coming to such close quarters with them.

Li Fei's blood was up. This was not even mock-heroic. It was mean and cowardly. He rushed towards the policemen and was lost in a mêlée of kicks and fisticuffs.

A young policeman went after a volley-ball player and grabbed her thigh and fell down with her.

The girl sat up, shouting angrily at the young man: "Shame on you!"

"Orders is orders," he replied, getting up with a smile and leisurely brushing the dust off his uniform.

The girl saw the policeman's cap lying on the ground.

"That's fine!" She picked up the cap and rose. Her white blouse with the college emblem on it was torn at the shoulder.

"No hard feelings, miss," said the young policeman. "We have orders to keep peace and order. Give me my cap."

The girl was still furious. "No." She pouted.

"Give it to me!"

"Come and get it."

The policeman closed in. The girl brandished the cap and slapped his face with it, a right and a left in a beautiful swinging rhythm. Then she started to run. Li Fei laughed. She was a good runner, but there was a crowd ahead of her. The young policeman came from behind and hugged her tightly. Whether he was wrenching the cap from her or not could not be seen. Li Fei aimed a terrific kick and felled the man, and the girl slipped out of his embrace.

Li Fei walked away nonchalantly as if he had done nothing. The young policeman got up, and slapped his cap on. He was looking about, excitement in his face.

"Did you kick me?"

"No, why should I?"

The girls were rapidly dispersing down the street with squeals, curses and moans. Some of the girls were limping. The policeman was limping, too, his face excited, showing the primitive joy of a male animal in combat.

A sergeant was looking on. A whistle blew and the men in their soiled and besmeared uniforms stepped back towards the alley.

"These modern college girls are wonderful!" one of them remarked.

"When will there be another demonstration with girls in it, Sergeant?" another asked.

The sergeant looked at Li Fei.

"What are you doing here?"

"I am a newspaper-man," answered Li Fei, and turned away.

The sergeant came after him. "You won't write all this up, will you? We had orders to break up the demonstration."

"You didn't have to manhandle the girls. Besides, they were fleeing."

"Just the normal course of our duty, I assure you."

The sergeant turned, motioning for the others to follow him.

The *mêlée* was over. To crown the irony, the police brass band started playing again, because it was also the normal course of duty for a band to play while in the street, as inevitable as it was for policemen to chase anyone running away.

The girl students had disappeared. The ground was strewn with the paper flags which only a little while ago had fluttered so bravely in the sun. The glorious march of Young China had come to a dismal end. There was a feminine touch. There were hairpins and ribbons all over the place. Li Fei also noticed a small tress of hair which must have been torn out of a girl's head.

He noticed a young girl in a black woollen gown sitting alone on a bench under a tree, her hair dishevelled, her hand rubbing her knee.

Li Fei walked over to her.

"Can I help you?"

The girl looked up. There was a comical blotch of dust across her right temple, but her eyes were big and dark.

"No, thank you."

"Are you hurt?"

"Not badly."

He saw a streak of blood oozing from a cut behind her ear.

"You are bleeding. There."

"Something hit me from behind. I am looking for my wrist-watch. It should be somewhere here."

"It should be easy to find it, if it is not already smashed." Li Fei looked around at the scene of disorder and paced the ground, methodically kicking the papers.

"Is it gold?" He turned to the girl. She had pulled up her gown and was examining the bruise on her knee. She quickly covered it again.

"Yes, gold-plated. I must have lost it here. I couldn't have lost it on the road."

The leaves of the trees cast dancing motley shadows on the bright ground. The girl rose and tried to move about. Clearly the bruise on her knee hurt.

The place was not big and a shining object should be found easily. The wind had now swept up most of the papers and swirled them off. Li Fei gathered up the remaining pieces and

still did not find the watch. He came back slowly towards the girl, who was standing bent with an arm on her knee. He saw something glittering in the moving shadows.

"There it is!" The watch was partly hidden in the dust. He fished it up, and held it close to his ear. It was not going.

"Thank you so much!" she said gratefully as he handed the watch to her, and she limped back to the bench. She had a small round face with a well-proportioned chin, and a slim, graceful body.

"Your cut is still bleeding."

"It's all right."

She bit her lips, fluffed her hair and tried to arrange it in order.

"There is a blotch of dirt on your temple."

He gave her his handkerchief to wipe it off. She did not quite succeed.

"Let me do it for you." He tapped the handkerchief lightly over her temple.

"I must look ghastly."

"No. You look heroic."

She cast him a smile. "There is nothing heroic about a scratch."

He tried to joke about it. "You have bled for the country. Come, that cut must be cleaned and bandaged. There is a hospital three blocks from here. I will take you there."

A trace of hesitation showed in her eyes. She rose half-willingly. He hailed a rickshaw and helped her up into it.

"I'll come along with you. You mustn't go alone."

"Then get another rickshaw."

"No. I prefer to walk. It is only a short way."

Li Fei told the rickshaw-puller to go slowly while he ran briskly beside her.

"I haven't thanked you properly," she said. "You haven't told me your name."

"Li," he said.

She looked at him again but did not ask further.

"And your name?"

"My name is Tu."

"It will help me at the hospital if I know your personal name."

"Jo-an." Her cheek coloured a little. "Jo for 'gentle'; and An for 'peace'."

Her face was pale. The cut behind her ear was hurting her. The excitement, the bleeding, her unkempt appearance, made her feel out of sorts. And now she felt cold. She gritted her teeth and rode along in the wind, but with a confused feeling of something comforting and good in this experience. Li Fei was walking by her side. It was good to be treated like a lady.

She attempted a conversation.

"Were you born here?"

"Yes, I grew up here. In the northern city." His voice was firm, confident, a little abrupt, his attitude carefree and nonchalant.

"I can tell from your accent." Li Fei, since coming back from Shanghai, had begun to speak the local dialect again, pronouncing 'chu' as 'pfu'.

"So can I."

"What do you do?"

"I am a *chiche*." *Chiche* meant anything from a reporter, a correspondent, to an editor. Even famous editors referred to themselves as *chiche*.

"So you are a writer!"

They had come to the entrance of the city hospital. Some wounded girls were coming out with bandages on their faces or hands. Jo-an recognised a student from her own college. She found that getting down from the rickshaw was more difficult than getting up. She stretched out a hand for help. Li offered her his arm and she slid down easily. He helped her up the steps.

They went into the waiting-room. More students, boys and girls, were waiting to be treated. Once in the room, away from the cold and the dust, Jo-an felt better.

"I am afraid we have to wait our turn," he said, and asked her to rest her head against the wall behind the bench. He went to the desk to register her.

"Her address?" asked the matron. He thought and wrote down: 'Girls' Normal School.' The matron was officious and fussy. She had been irritated by the sudden rush of patients.

"Her identity, please."

"Her injury is her identity," he said impatiently.

The matron looked up at him. "I have no time for trifling. What is her father's name, age and address?"

Li Fei did not think that the treating of an emergency case had anything to do with the patient's father, but he checked himself. He took the registration card and went back to the bench.

For the first time, Jo-an, resting her head against the wall, took a full look at the young man. He was a medium tall, wiry figure. He had a face with clear, sharp features, a sensitive mouth and a remarkable sparkle in his eyes. His movements were quick, his steps decisive and alert, yet there was an air of easy nonchalance about him. An unruly tuft of hair was on the point of falling over his forehead.

Their eyes met and she lowered her eyelashes. It was nice to know a young man like this. She was still holding his blood-stained handkerchief against her head.

"Here," he said, "they want to know your father's name and your address. I can fill it in for you. What is the address?"

"The Tafuti, East City." Li Fei's eyes flashed in surprise. Everybody in Si-an knew the Tafuti, the ancient mansion built by Governor Tu Heng. 'Tafuti' means 'Lord's Residence', and *Tafu* was the official rank of her grandfather! Li Fei scribbled down the address while his thoughts ran fast. He hoped sincerely that he was not helping a daughter of Tu Fanglin, the ex-mayor. He had been away from Si-an and had come back only a year ago, and he had not known Tu Fanglin to have a daughter.

"And your father's name?" he asked, his voice vibrating.

"Tu Chung . . . Chung for loyalty," she added quietly, and watched his expression.

Li Fei had heard of Tu Chung, the scholar, brother of Tu Fanglin. He was well acquainted with Tu Chung's fiery, trenchant articles during the first years of the Republic, expounding his unswerving faith in 'limited monarchy'. Tu Chung was a royalist. Since his association with the short-lived monarchist plot laid by the pig-tailed general Chang to restore the boy emperor to the throne, he had been keeping quiet, out of the political picture. In spite of that unfortunate adventure, he was generally respected as a man of sincere convictions, an ardent supporter of the monarchy when it was highly unpopular, and a great scholar. In the Empire days

he had been a *hanlin*, a member of the Imperial Academy of Scholars. He was a friend of the great scholar Liang Chichao, but while Liang had switched over to republicanism, he was stubbornly faithful to a monarchy which was gone. He had been among the last to cut off his queue.

Jo-an saw Li Fei throw a quick glance at her while he wrote down her father's name.

He went to the desk with the card and returned.

"You are looking pale. I wish I could get you a cup of tea."

She smiled easily. "They don't serve tea in a hospital waiting-room." Colour came into her cheeks.

Li Fei walked about and learned that a boy whose belly had been poked open was taking up a lot of time. The nurses were kept busy.

He came back to her with his face showing irritation.

"So stupid of them," he said.

"Not stupid. They have to take care of the severe cases first."

"I don't mean the nurses. I mean the policemen. One part of the police led the procession and another part broke it up. That is Si-an. The craziest things can happen." Suddenly his tongue loosened. "They should have beaten up their own brass band!"

She laughed. It hurt her wound and she drew a quick breath through her teeth.

"I am sorry."

"It does not matter. Keep talking. I like it."

"Furthermore, if the police hear that the mayor's niece from the Tafuti is among the wounded, the police chief himself will come running to apologise to your uncle. The mayor is your uncle, isn't he?"

Her face was suddenly tense. "Yes. That is what I don't want. My uncle mustn't know."

He jerked his head back in a laugh.

"You don't know him," she said.

"I do, but I don't think the police will bother to check the names of the injured. . . . They really shouldn't keep you waiting so long."

He walked towards the dressing-room again, and tapped the glass door. A nurse came to the door.

"There is a girl here. She has been waiting for half an hour

and her bleeding has not stopped. Will you do something for her?"

The nurse looked up at his tall figure and said with a smile: "Bring her along."

Happily Li Fei returned to tell her. He had to stop at the glass door. She turned to smile at him as she went inside.

After a few minutes, she came out. Her face had been cleansed, and her hair brushed, and a neat piece of bandage showed behind her ear. He saw her deep, smouldering eyes.

She put out her hand to thank him. Her long lashes, her small round face, and a suggestion of sadness in her eyes told him that it was wrong to part like this.

"I haven't really learned your name," she said. "I should, after you have done so much to help me."

"My name is Fei. Li Fei."

"Fei for 'fly'?"

"Yes."

"Why, I didn't know all this time. You are the famous correspondent!" She looked at him for a silent second.

"Please do not embarrass me. You really must have a good rest now. And you must be hungry."

He looked at his wrist-watch. "In any case it is long past twelve. They would not be expecting you back after all this confusion."

Weakly she replied: "No."

"The lunch-hour is over and it is a long way to your home. May I have the pleasure of taking you to lunch?"

She accepted gaily, with a sense of light adventure.

They went out to a restaurant, where he ordered hot tea, and then rice and a delicious carp soup and mutton fried with onions.

Jo-an felt her normal self again. She had liked this man's writings and had never dreamed of meeting him in person. She found herself sitting next to a man whose inner thoughts she had known.

She said: "I remember that piece you wrote about kow-towing."

"You liked it?"

"I laughed so much when I read it."

He remembered that he had written on the calisthenic value

of kow-towing. He had recommended it as a form of exercise. The bending of the knees, the putting together of the palms followed by an outward sweep of the arms, and the repeated prostrations gave exercise to the muscles of the whole body. It was like swimming, but better, because one might get a job by kow-towing but not by swimming. He had recommended it for all aspirants to political jobs, and especially for tried-and-true bureaucrats to practise daily and assiduously. He had also recommended it incidentally for ladies' slimming exercises. He had quoted the inscription of Confucius' ancestor: "At the first command [of the king], I bend my head; at the second command, I bend my chest; at the third command, I bend my waist. I run closely along the wall and no one dare insult me."

"Let the bureaucrats take note of that," he had said. It was light, playful and satirical.

"How did you come to write for a newspaper?" Her eyes were dark and her voice eager.

"I don't know. We do not know why we do things—especially the things that mean much in our life. As a matter of fact, I drifted into it. When I graduated, there was an opening on a newspaper and I took it."

"Didn't you say to yourself that you wanted to write?"

"Maybe I did. I really don't know. I do it because I have to make a living."

"And you like it?" There was an artlessness in her pursuing questions.

"I like it. It gives me a good excuse to travel. I love to travel. I like it especially now when I find that a beautiful girl like you reads it and likes it."

She wanted to thank him for the compliment, but she did not. She liked the simple, natural way he talked about his writing. She was curious and excited, but she held herself back.

"Let's not talk about me. Where is your father?"

"He lives at Sunganor."

"Where is that?"

"In South Kansu. We have an estate there."

He was fascinated and his eyes showed it. Li Fei was not a monarchist—on the contrary. But as a writer he could not help being interested in knowing the daughter of a well-known

scholar whose obstreperous views had always impressed his readers.

Li Fei called for the bill. She offered to pay, but he insisted on paying, and made ready to go.

"May I ask you a favour?" she asked, her voice quivering a little. "If you write anything about the incident this morning, don't mention my name."

"Why?"

"Because my uncle would not like it. He is always on the side of the authorities. He would be displeased to find his niece's name in the papers, connected with a demonstration against the police."

"Won't he know anyway, when you get home?"

"He can't blame me when I tell him that the whole student body went. So long as my name does not appear in the papers, he won't mind."

Li Fei had heard about the fat, jaundiced Tu Fanglin, ex-mayor and pillar of Si-an society, ardent supporter of public morality and law and order. He looked at her indulgently and said, "I understand," and then added with an interested look: "You are all right."

He called a rickshaw for her. She turned towards him and gave him a smile and a look that stayed on his mind for ever. She had such dark eyes.

2

THE BRIEF WAR IN SHANGHAI, FAR FROM DISTURBING THE interior, had brought a boom to Si-an. With the temporary removal of the capital to Loyang, there was a great influx of government leaders, party workers, generals, newspaper-men, and a number of so-called 'intellectuals'—college presidents, foreign policy experts, economists, famous scholars, and what not.

Hardly a day passed without some important personages arriving at the railway station and a brass band playing on the platform to receive them. If a personage was important enough, there might be two bands, one from the local police and one

from the provincial government. From the time the train pulled in to the station to the time the important visitor left the platform, but especially when he alighted from his carriage, the two bands would be playing simultaneously, each a different tune in a different key, in consonance with the theory that the bigger the noise, the heartier the welcome.

A national emergency conference was planned to be held in Loyang. A delegation was coming to consider the creation of Si-an as the 'Western Capital'. Since Si-an had been the renowned capital of ancient China, and was only a few hours from Loyang by train, most of the leaders took the chance to pay a visit. The steel-bodied Blue Express had been put on the the Lunghai railway. The illiterate war-lord, the commander of the Si-an police, and the head of the Railway Administration were kept busy. The police had new spring uniforms. There was a noticeable increase of motor-cars on the streets. There was also considerable movement of troops. Dusty, ragged soldiers, wearing puttees and sandals, roamed the city, some still wearing fur-lined Manchurian hats with ear-flaps.

While the League of Nations had appointed the Lytton Commission to consider the right and the wrong of the 'Mukden incident', Japan had gone on consolidating her conquests of the Manchurian provinces. The Emperor Puyi had been kidnapped while Lord Lytton was travelling between Japan and Shanghai, the state of 'Manchukuo' had been declared. The Chinese soldiers driven from their homeland in Manchuria had trekked across the Great Wall and had come inland, an army without a base. A great many filtered into the north-west. A distinguished commander of the Manchurian forces had come himself and taken up temporary residence at Tungkwan, a short way from Si-an. The theatres, tea-houses and restaurants were doing a roaring business because a great many actors, actresses and girl entertainers had also fled to Si-an.

* * * * *

It took Li Fei twenty minutes to walk home after his lunch with Jo-an. He loved to walk. The city fascinated him, even though he had grown up in it. Coming back from Shanghai, he saw it with mature eyes. The city was full of bold colours like the dresses of the peasant girls in a village fair, bright reds and

ducks-egg greens and deep purples. You could see in the streets of Si-an mothers still walking with bound feet, while walking with them were modern college girls in long sinuous gowns and with curled hair. It was a city of strong contrasts, of ancient city walls and mule-carts and modern motor-cars, of tall old northern merchants and young patriotic party men in Chungshan uniform, of illiterate war-lords and ruffian soldiers, of cheats and prostitutes, of old restaurants with discoloured fronts, the kitchens near the doorways, and a flashy modern hotel of the China Travel Bureau, of camel caravans competing with the big imposing Railroad Administration, of lama priests in their purple robes, a few straggling Mongols looking lost when not on horseback, and some thousands of turbaned Mohammedans, particularly in the north-west of the city.

For a year now, Li Fei had been at home, writing his 'Si-an Correspondence' for the national newspaper. Before that, it had been a series of 'Loyang Correspondence'. He had an unusual way of writing his reports. He never wanted to write a factual, statistical account of anything, and always let his personal feelings run away with his pen. The Shanghai editor had complained several times. Once, after sending off an article, he got a telegram from the editor sarcastically worded: "My dear Li Fei, will you, out of your great generosity, telegraph back where and when the episode took place, and the exact full name and nativity of the who? Your story gives only what and how." To the editor's surprise, readers wrote in to say that they liked Li Fei's articles, that there was always a personal touch in his style and comments which made his stories unique and worth reading. Li Fei had indeed created a style of his own, half-serious, half-whimsical and often satirical, and the readers liked his comments more than his facts. He had thus made a name for himself, and the editor allowed him a great deal of laxity in his peculiarly personal reports. Still, he did not like his job as a newspaper correspondent, and he wanted to write novels. He kept at it because he had to make a living, and because, after all, the newspaper job was still very largely a writing job. He loved to write. Some writers wrote their novels like municipal reports, while Li Fei liked to write his newspaper reports like novels or short stories. This was

unorthodox, unprofessional, and unsanctioned by the code of journalistic writing. But he did it.

He had in fact written a short novel, only two hundred pages long, based on his experiences with the Northern Expedition when the Kuomintang marched north from Canton to overthrow the various war-lords in the provinces. Caught with the enthusiasm of a young man for the nationalist revolution, with the avowed purpose of overthrowing the war-lords and uniting China, he had quit college in his third year and joined the march as a great many college students did. The novel amused his readers, but he did not think much of it. It had turned out to be a high burlesque of the party workers, with their slogan-shouting and their peculiar ceremonies and style of speech. It almost turned out to be a mock manual for party workers. While the Kuomintang army was fighting battles on its way, capturing town after town, he made his hero discourse eloquently on the technique of pasting slogans, the method of preparing the paste, the selection and use of the paste-brush and paste-can and ladder, the preference for the blue colour, how to paint large characters over city walls and bridge arches; in short, how to make the population slogan-conscious. There were other amusing sections on Kuomintang ceremonies, salutes, bows, and above all, 'applause' after a speech. The printed agenda of a Kuomintang meeting often consisted partly of the following:

3. Speech by the party leader.
4. Applause by the audience.
5. Introduction of the commanding general.
6. Audience stands up in welcome and applauds.
7. Speech by the commanding general.
8. Applause by the audience.
9. The party leader praises the general's speech and Sun Yat-sen.

Since the public was sick of the slogans and hated to see the ubiquitous posters disfigure the town and countryside, the novel was a great success and was quietly recommended by the party workers who had themselves had too much of it. It was considered the best parody of the Northern Expedition.

Tired of the revolution, Li Fei had gone back to finish college.

He had made a little name for himself. When he graduated, a friend he had made during the Expedition introduced him to the *Sinkungpao*. He had been its correspondent now for three years, choosing his own place and locality, for his reports never duplicated those of the other reporters.

His home was in the cheaper section near the north-eastern corner of the ancient city wall. Behind the house was a street with stalls for vegetables, kept by the peasants in the neighbourhood, and a few butchers' shops, grocery stores, a Mohammedan restaurant, and two or three cheap eating-places for the common people.

The houses were built of adobe or sun-baked bricks, some plastered and some not. Beyond the straggling street was a big pond with the neighbours' geese and ducks on it, overgrown with duck-weed and marsh plants around its borders, where he had played in childhood. In summer the pond dwindled to half its size, and as a boy he used to walk in the soft mud and dig for clam shells. The sensation of sinking his feet in the cool mud and letting it ooze up between his toes was unforgettable. He loved the pond and the view of the ancient city wall and the large tract of land, covered with rank weeds, leading up to the wall.

His house was better built than the others. It was an old solid house built of burnt bricks, standing in a quiet alley. He could have gone up that alley blindfolded and still have found his entrance. He had grown up in it, played in it with the neighbours' boys, and had grown up to see the alley visibly shrink in length and width every time he came back from Shanghai during his college days.

The entrance was flanked by two columns of red bricks jutting out from the white plastered wall. As a child he loved to trail stick along the wall with his eyes closed. When the stick hit the brick projection, he knew he had arrived. He had always done that when his mother sent him shopping for vegetables and bean-curd, and his mother would be standing in the doorway watching him. He would open his eyes and often bump into his mother, and his mother would smile, even though he might have crushed the package of bean-curd in his hand.

Now his mother was middle-aged. He did not close his eyes any more as he came home. He walked with quick, decisive

steps, and knocked. Usually Lima, the maid-servant, came to open the door. During his childhood they had not been able to afford a maid. His father, an employee on the railway, had died when he was quite young. His mother had washed and cooked for her family and raised the two brothers all alone. Now they could afford a maid. As a boy he had promised to give his mother 'a globeful of dimes' when he grew up. When he sold his first article to a newspaper, he changed the three dollars fifty into ten-cent and twenty-cent pieces. He had bought a school globe, cut a round hole at the North Pole, and begun putting his coins in it. By his third year at college he had collected enough almost to fill the globe, and he brought it home and presented it to his mother.

“There is my globeful of dimes for you, Mother,” he said, shaking it to make a great jingle. His mother laughed until her face was all creased. He continued to play and joke with his mother after he was grown-up, and to fool her with all sorts of tales, true and false, so that she was mystified, never quite knowing whether to take him at his word or not. A bit of this impishness, of mixing sense with nonsense, crept into his style.

Sometimes it was his sister-in-law, Tuanerh, who came to open the door, a wisp of a woman who had a silvery voice like a bell. She was a shopkeeper's daughter whom his mother had selected for his brother. How that small girl produced three boys was a complete mystery to him. His brother was five feet eleven, an inch taller than he. The brother, Li Ping, was a man of few words and rarely showed his emotions. He was now a successful fur and wool merchant. How his mother had toiled and sweated to bring up the two brothers, to set the elder one up in business and put the younger through college, was one of the things that impressed him and made him think that women were superior to men. At least as far as bringing up children was concerned, fathers were totally unnecessary. Li Fei believed very much in the laws of nature, that what nature had planned and provided was always superior to what men could learn to achieve. Ganders are not expected to bring up goslings, and cocks make ridiculous fathers. He also believed that an untutored street-girl, if well endowed by nature, could capture a man's heart, be he a famous soldier or scholar, because nature never planned for a girl to have a school diploma in order to win a man.

self. In a way she was pleased that a romantic interest had been awakened in him. He had taken no interest in girls since that other time.

Just now the thought of writing his article did not weigh on his mind. He knew his readers would want to read about what happened, but he was in no hurry. His arrangement with *Sinkungpao* was to write a minimum of six articles a month, and he was paid by the piece with a minimum fee. Unless there was something extraordinary, he did not have to telegraph. His kind of articles enabled him to depend on the work of other reporters. He would read the next morning's local papers and find all the facts, the exact names of persons and places—what he called the 'pussyfoot work of reporters'. Then he would digest the facts and add the sauce and send his article off by air-mail which left Si-an once a week, on Wednesdays. Wednesday was a long way off yet. The story of the student demonstration, plainly told as it was, was good melodrama.

He could write 'Chronicles of Si-an', a whole series of such melodramas. What did he not know about Si-an? There were many things he knew and everybody knew, which he knew better than to publish. The governor was an illiterate war-lord, five feet ten, who had eaten a lot of dust before he reached the present position, one of the many hearty swashbucklers who blossomed into provincial and national importance in the first decades of the Republic without the benefit of much schooling. Once, during martial law proclaimed by himself, he had tried to pass a sentry. He was in civilian dress and was challenged.

"Your mother!" he swore.

"The sentry challenged him again. "Password!"

"Your mother!" the governor repeated the obscene oath, brushed the sentry aside and had him shot at once.

Thereafter other officers imitated his example. The sentries always passed those who had the courage to swear at their mothers. Then civilians followed suit. How was the poor sentry to know who might be the governor in disguise?

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Thinking of the girl he had met this morning, by a subtle association of ideas he betook himself to call on Lang late in the afternoon. Lang Jushui was a very singular man of about

twenty-eight. When Li Fei had joined the Northern Expedition, Lang had gone on with his studies and then had gone to Paris to study art. He had come back with a profound knowledge of French cuisine and how to make French *pommes frites*.

In a way they were opposites. Lang seemed like a wealthy young man who had nothing better to do than to play with his camera, his painting, his chess and his goldfish. But he had a wonderfully sensitive face, with a very light complexion. He had no taste for business or politics. He could not harm a fly. He had come back from abroad with the conviction that there was something in the way of life of China which was superior to that of every country, though he could hardly formulate his thoughts. Li Fei, on the contrary, had never been abroad, but was filled with a conviction that China must change or she would not survive in this modern world. Li Fei would get amused or enraged by the doings of the war-lords, but Lang was coldly indifferent, just not interested. In spite of such differences of views, they remained best friends. Both of them loved to travel. Li Fei had induced Lang to come to Si-an, to visit the ancient capital. Lang had intended to come for a few months and had stayed for almost a year.

Li Fei took a rickshaw and went towards the East Main Street. Near the Manchurian quarter he got down and worked his way through jostling crowds in several narrow alleys before he came to the house where Lang was staying with a friend, the pock-marked Fan Wenpo.

Wenpo was a short man with a throaty voice. He had a head of thick, bristling hair. His face was well-proportioned and, as his pock-marks were only slight, he was not bad-looking. When you see a friend's face constantly, you do not notice its disfiguring marks. People with pock-marked faces are usually able, stubborn, and difficult to deal with. Perhaps, being used to abuse and ridicule in childhood, they develop a generally aggressive front. Wenpo was experienced, worldly, cynical, self-confident, and a wonderful talker. Without any particular accomplishment he had met and known everybody. He moved in the circle of artists and well-known personalities and was able to hold their friendship.

Li Fei knew him well and Fen, being a bachelor with a big

house, had offered Lang his hospitality. Fan loved friends. He had a way of talking straight to Li and giving him brusque advice. Occasionally he was sarcastically and dryly witty.

"What is up?" Fan asked now as Li Fei came in.

"I want to talk to Lang."

"Why not to me? Lang is taking a nap."

Their voices waked Lang in the next room. He came out, rubbing his eyes and buttoning his fur gown. His hand-knitted coarse woollen socks bulged over his large cloth shoes. He had discarded his Western dress and he walked with a slight waddle, in the manner of scholars of the old days. The thin little walrus moustache forming two lines around the corners of his mouth, the small tuft of beard, and the keen, interested look in his eyes emphasised what was regarded as a literary face. Lang never had the brusqueness of Fan. He spoke in a soft voice. His longish oval face, his light complexion, and the soft refinement in his eyes gave the distinct impression of an artist-scholar, that is, a man all emotion with no thoughts and no memories.

He sat down on a hard couch with a black cover, the couch on which Lang and Fan sat so many hours playing chess long into the night.

A manservant came in and automatically served tea.

"What is interesting?" Lang asked.

"Nothing. I came back from the student demonstration this morning and had lunch and have nothing to do. I thought I would drop in to see you."

"He has something specific to speak to you about that he does not want to tell me," said Fan.

"I didn't say that."

"Almost."

"There was a fight with the police. Quite a number of students and some policemen were hurt. They fought with bamboo poles. Some of the girl students' dresses were torn."

"I should have loved to have seen that," remarked Fan.

"Do not be so heartless. They were demonstrating for the war in Shanghai."

"The war will not last, anyway."

"Why do you think so?"

"It cannot. Do not fool yourself. The Japs have been driven to the outskirts. All right. But their navy has not got into action

yet. Why don't we take a stroll to the bazaar and have tea there?"

The three of them set out. Lang and Li Fei loved to walk, but Fan would not agree to use his legs. They took rickshaws and went to a tea-house in the bazaar, where they took a table and watched the afternoon crowd through the glass partitions. It was long before the story-teller's hour and the room was only half filled. They sat on bare wooden chairs with hard cotton cushions and a square shaky table on which stood dishes of melon seeds, peanuts, hazel-nuts and hardened *wushiang toufu*—a bean product. Lang ordered eight ounces of *kaoliang* wine and a dish of smoked fish, for he loved a little drink in the afternoon.

Li Fei took a sip of the *kaoliang* and felt good. He could stand some liquor, but he had to take it in slow sips.

"You ought to have heard Miss Tsui O-yun last night," said Fan. "She has come from Peking."

Fan was always raving about some girl. Miss Tsui was a monologist who told stories and dramatised episodes of history to the rhythm of a small drum, curiously called 'big drum'.

"A great talent for her age," said Fan. "You should come and listen to her. She is at the Tisanlou."

"What story was she telling?"

"About Li Siang-hun."

"That should be good," said Li Fei, interested.

"When she ranted at Yuan, her captor and torturer, she was superb."

"Do you know anybody at the Girls' Normal School?" Li Fei asked abruptly.

Fan looked at him squarely. "Is this in line of your duty as correspondent, or is it something else?"

"Perhaps both. Is there anybody you know there?"

"Not at Girls' Normal. I can dig up some information if it is for your newspaper."

"Don't trouble. I had lunch with one of their injured students."

"But you are a monk. I never knew you to be interested in girls."

Li Fei did not like this tone. He had wanted to speak about Jo-an to Lang. To Fan all women are alike, but Lang would

understand and not joke about it. He felt like an astronomer who had discovered a new star and just had to talk about it.

"She was left behind because her knee was hurt. I helped her to a hospital and then invited her to a restaurant."

"What is she like?" Lang asked.

"She is young and rather small, but has the prettiest dark eyes I ever saw. She is the kind of a girl once you've met her you don't ever want to lose her again."

"This sounds bad," remarked Fan, clicking his tongue.

"Can you see her again?" asked Lang.

"I think so if I try. She is a niece of the ex-mayor Tu."

"That is horrible!" Fan exclaimed. "You haven't a chance unless you own a mill or a bank."

"But I can try."

"Yes, you can try. But I would not advise you to see this Miss Tu at her uncle's house. The doorkeeper would throw you out."

Li Fei was feeling the ground he was treading. He had every reason to believe that Jo-an, left to herself, would give him a chance to see her again. He was sure they would have many things to talk about together. He was almost sure that, while she stood in awe of her uncle, she had some independent ideas of her own. When she had asked him to keep her name out of the newspaper, he had detected a look of worry behind the vivacity of her eyes.

"Have you ever seen Tu Chung the *hanlin*, her father?"

"Yes," said Fan. "He is very well known for his calligraphy. I met him twice at the *peilin* (Forest of Stone Inscriptions) peering at the ancient writing."

"He must be an interesting man to meet," said Lang.

"Quite. If you can quote the classics and show sympathy for the ancient ideas, he will talk to you. He is probably the last of the royalists. Most of them are dead now."

"No wonder he has such an unusual daughter."

The talk rambled on about Jo-an's father. Tu Chung was a difficult and fiery but a rare man. As an old Confucianist, he had a peculiar sense of loyalty to the vanished throne and none whatsoever to the Republic. He had refused to serve Yuan Shih-kai when Yuan was trying to be emperor, although by conviction he was a staunch royalist. He considered that Yuan had

treacherously sold out Emperor Kuanghsu and was but a usurper. In the days when Emperor Kuanghsu was imprisoned by his aunt, the empress dowager, he was in the pro-emperor party with Premier Weng Tungho and Kang Yuwei, against the republican revolutionists led by Sun Yat-sen.

Tu Chung had two convictions. One was that while China must reform, it must keep the monarchy, like Japan. The other was that 'Chinese learning must serve as the base; Western learning must serve for the applications'—by which he meant steamships, guns, electricity and water-pipes. It was one of those stock formulas popular in the eighteen-nineties by which men, faced with the modern age, tried to arrive at some solutions. Nobody could shake Tu Chung out of these convictions.

There is nothing you can do about a convinced royalist; he would rather go down with the storm than swim with the tide. The modern chaos had confirmed him in his convictions and made him a lone champion of lost causes and an upholder of unpopular ideas. But there was the old oak, tall and erect; it could not rot from inside, though it might be felled by a woodsman's axe. The spectacle of the shoddy Republic, with its illiterate war-lords and untutored governors, and the modern education turning out semi-illiterates in their own culture and history, like his own nephew Tsujen, deserved his contempt. All this he traced to the disappearance of the Empire. The cause might not be there, but the political disunity of the Republic confirmed him in his opinion that China had gone to the dogs. His simple explanation for the rise of Japan was that Japan still had an emperor, and the old loyalty in men's hearts was not gone.

After supper they went over to Tisanlou to hear Tsui O-yun's dramatic monologues. Miss Tsui was not to appear until eight o'clock, but the tea-house was already packed to capacity. Fan seemed to know the ushers and the ushers knew him and arranged a reserved table for them.

Fan was at home here, looking very much like a man about town. He wore his felt hat cocked to one side and did not take it off until the house got too hot. The hall hummed with the conversation of men and women, all there to hear the storyteller from Peking. The ushers expertly tossed hot towels to one another over the guests' heads. They were busy pouring hot

water from a big bronze kettle into individual tea-cups, passing melon seeds and sweets and *wushiang niujou* (dry sliced beef cooked with aniseed), pocketing change, moving benches and squeezing in new ones for late-comers. Nobody was paying attention to what was going on on the platform. A very mixed crowd, from the best-dressed women to the common labourers, gathered to enjoy the evening and to be moved by the smooth caroling in perfect rhythm by a famous girl entertainer.

Miss Tsui made her appearance on the stage. She wore bangs on her forehead and had a very young figure. She was dressed in bright blue. The admiring audience yelled their applause, a typical forceful "Yow!" directed from below the diaphragm. The chorus of Yows burst like a string of fire-crackers. The Si-an audience was warm and enthusiastic. Miss Tsui walked forward professionally towards a small drum. Her eyes surveyed the audience, glittering in the unshaded electric lights with a barely detectable smile. Then her face became serious. She took a drink of warm boiled water from a glass on the desk and turned to the old man who had come out with her. She waited for him to tune up his three-stringed instrument (the *sanshuan*), and then tapped the small drum three times and the audience fell into a hush. She announced that she was going to tell the *Kungcheng-chi*, the episode in which Chuko Liang, by a clever stratagem, kept the enemy away from a city when his troops happened to have been sent away. The story had been told a hundred times over, but the audience never tired of it. In a dialogue she impersonated different persons. Her gestures were perfect, her voice clear, and her enunciation gave the language she spoke a beauty in modulation that the audience had not thought possible. The whole story was told in cadenced lines of a definite metre, marked by the small drum. She could excite the audience and send a quiver to their hearts just by subtly changing the tempo of the drum-beat. In emotional passages she burst out into a short song. Her name, O-yun, meant 'piercing the clouds', but her voice was round, not sharp, like marbles rolling in a jade bowl. The audience relaxed and enjoyed the flow of the feminine, rhythmic sound.

In the silence Li Fei sat with his senses numbed by the combination of music, song, and words, and the girl's vivacious and graceful gestures. His mind wandered. The day's events, the

little wine he had taken at dinner, and the girl's voice put him into a musing mood. Very rarely had he allowed himself to sink into such a lazy, comfortable state of intoxication. While the girl was telling her story, he was enjoying its sounds without their meaning. His thoughts shifted to Jo-an with her head inclined, her eyes—her deep, dark, smouldering eyes—and her laughter. He waked to find that Miss Tsui had stopped.

At the end of the performance, Fan stood up and motioned for them to follow him. He led them to a room upstairs, knocked, and found the young story-teller talking with the old man, who turned out to be her father. Fan said that he wanted to pay his personal compliments and offered to be of help if there was anything she needed. He gave the girl some advice about what to see while she was in the city, such as the Dramatic School which trained boys, from the age of eight, to be actors.

"Is this the first time you have visited Si-an?"

The old father nodded.

"Your daughter is marvellous. Si-an has not done justice to her."

The old man was polite but puzzled. "I think we have a very warm and appreciative audience."

"She has a good audience. That is not enough," said Fan warmly. "She should get better publicity. You want to get the gentry and the officials to come and listen to her. There should be newspaper write-ups. The governor himself might invite her to give a performance at his residence, if you are lucky."

"You are very kind. We are making a good living as it is."

"But she should make a great hit in Si-an, if you know how. It will cost nothing," Fan added persuasively. "You should send some complimentary tickets to a few prominent families. The tea-house manager can do it for you. I can give you a few names."

He wrote down a few addresses. One of them was for the Tu family, with the simple address: "Tafuti, East City."

Handing the paper to the old man, he said: "Ask the proprietor to deliver the tickets. And be sure to have a few good reserved tables ready next Saturday night. My friend here is a newspaper-man. I will ask him to write up something."

The old man and Miss Tsui were greatly impressed.

"I don't know how to thank you," said Miss Tsui. She was

only seventeen, and off stage she was dressed simply. She had bright eyes and her face had a natural lustre, but otherwise she behaved just like an ordinary working girl. Artists of her class do not assume airs; they cannot afford to. It is part of their profession to deal with powerful people.

On the stairs going out, Li Fei asked Fan: "Why are you so interested in promoting Miss Tsui?"

"You idiot! I am doing you a great favour! And I want to see Miss Tu myself. That is why I marked it down for a Saturday. I hope Miss Tu will come."

3

JO-AN DID NOT GO HOME FROM SCHOOL UNTIL THE NEXT DAY. There was a song in her heart and a lilt in her voice. They say everyone's life is very much the same; it is the hopes, the dreams with which we colour and clothe it that make it different. Jo-an was the wayward sort. At college she had acquired the nickname Goddess of Mercy because of her abstract, dreamy look. Nobody knew what the Goddess of Mercy was dreaming about.

She had met Li Fei only this once. He had been kind to her. He seemed to disapprove of her family, but he had said proudly and condescendingly: "You are all right." Nothing more, but it was enough for her. It had been an exciting experience. She had a kind of reckless enthusiasm and a hope that they would meet again.

With a little effort, she could conceal her slight limp, which was barely noticeable. She knew that her badge of courage, her bandage, considering its origin, was not going to be received warmly by her uncle. She tucked her red woollen muffler higher as she reached her house.

The sober afternoon sun shone on the raised entrance of the Tafuti. It was a mansion built sixty or seventy years ago in the style of an official's residence. Across the entrance the gilt letters TAFUTI stood on a green background in a horizontal tablet with two smaller words IMPERIAL FAVOUR in the top border.

As at all such residences, there was a wide standing space for carriages, where now a shining black Packard stood. Facing the

entrance was a wall bent like parts of a hexagon. Two stone lions flanked the steps of the entrance. At the middle of the covered entrance was an open hall. The main gate behind, leading to the first courtyard, was closed except for official occasions, the side door being used normally.

The vermilion gate had a recent coat of paint, and the gilt knobs on it glittered from the sheltered entrance. The vermilion gate was over twelve feet high and ten feet wide, indicative of the style of the governor who had it built. The tiles on the floor, such as were not made nowadays, were a foot and a half square, a heavy grey. The gatekeeper's rooms on the sides of the open hall were unusually spacious, reminding one of generations ago when a house was a house and space was space. Around the central gate, the partition and the side doors were painted black. Tu Fanglin had always seen to it that the exterior of the entrance was kept in its ancient dignity, and the gatekeeper, Lao Wang, was instructed to keep the gilt knobs brightly burnished. Some joker remarked that "even the stone lions of that house had illicit affairs." But looking at the bright red and gold of the gate, one could not help being impressed by the affluence of the family. As the gate was never opened except on very formal occasions, it was more decorative than useful, but it did serve the purpose of being looked upon by visitors as a visible symbol of the family's social status.

On the first court, paved with large fine slabs and reached by three stone steps, stood the first hall, used for receptions. A portrait in water-colours of the grandfather hung over the central panel, whose fine latticework, traced in gold and faded pink, permitted glances into the second court. The furniture was in severe sandalwood, with rounded corners and marble tops. On the side walls hung scrolls of calligraphy in the grand style. On the west wall were vertical scrolls in the carefully lettered style of *hanlin* script, written by Jo-an's father. On the east hung a couplet in characters more than a foot high by Weng Tungho, one of the last premiers of Emperor Kuanghsu's reign, a close friend of Tu Chung. With the couplet was a painting of a massive waterfall by Ma Yuan, a priceless treasure.

This note of antique grandeur was spoiled, however, by a cheap oil reprint of *The Choice of Paris* showing three nude women seen from different angles. Tsujen, son of the ex-mayor,

had bought this for his own house. He was living separately in the eastern residential section, but his wife Sianghua had rejected the print as indecent. Jo-an's uncle liked it, and so had it hung here. A Western painting may be a masterpiece, but, hung side by side with Ma Yuan's waterfall, this one was obscene and strangely out of place.

A full-length mirror in a cheap gilt oval frame, designed for an eighteenth-century boudoir, stood diagonally in a corner. This article, being an imported 'western ocean mirror' as it was called, was considered fashionable and elegant. It was said that evil spirits, normally invisible, would be reflected in the mirror, and so the mirror served the double purpose of exposing and scaring away such evil spirits and enabling ex-mayor Tu Fanglin to admire himself in it before he set out for his office. It was his habit to stand in front of the mirror, finger his moustache in a few smooth strokes, and study his lumpy face, always inclined to be rotund, before he went out.

Things were so deceptive. Physically, the family might be living in the shadow of the great statesman who was their ancestor, whose portrait, with a full, round forehead, a well-balanced benign face and a white beard, beamed from the wall on his progeny. Yet the total effect of the hall was jarring, incongruous and brashly confident, like its present owner. It was more like the home of a rich salt fish merchant, which the uncle was, than that of a descendant of the great statesman-scholar.

She hoped that her uncle was taking a nap. Quickly she crossed the first court to the covered corridor on the west. Chunmei heard her footsteps and called from the uncle's room: "Is that you, Third Aunt?"

Chunmei had come to the house as the aunt's maid, but she called Jo-an Third Aunt because her two children had been born of the ex-mayor. Her position was strictly 'unclassified'. Ancient families liked to add up the total number of cousins, to give the impression of a thriving family. So Jo-an was number one, although she was an only child.

Jo-an passed to the back court and entered by a moon door to her own court, which was on the west. It was a neat, secluded court, paved with bluish fine-grained long slabs, each fifteen feet long, on which stood two big goldfish-jars, thickly coated

on the inside with green moss. The two pear trees near the wall were bare in the winter sun. She lingered for a while to admire the potted begonias on the porch.

On reaching her court, she felt lonely. She had had a very happy childhood with her father and mother. She was their only child. She was old enough to remember her grandfather and grandmother. Then her mother had died, when she was fourteen and they were living in Peking. Before that they had lived in the south, in Kiashing, where her father had been *taotai* (district governor) in the days of the Empire.

Now things had changed. Since her mother died she had been left much alone. Her father was serving under General Sun Chuanfang in Shanghai, and when Sun was defeated by the Kuomintang Party, his property was confiscated, and he went to Japan and sent his daughter to college in Si-an because here was her ancestral home. After a few years' wandering her father had come back and stayed at the *Tafuti*. The brothers did not get on well together, and Tu Chung was too disdainful to discuss the business end of the family, though he had run out of funds. He had chosen to go and live in a lamasery near their ancestral estate in Sunganor.

* * * * *

Tangma had been chatting with the other servants. Hearing that her young mistress was back, she hurried to the court. Tangma had brought up Jo-an since she was seven, and since her mother's death had been her faithful servant and companion, feeling responsible for her like a mother. She came from Peking, and kept rather aloof from the other servants—her one loyalty being to Tu Chung's family—for she had the peasant respect for a *hanlin* who had been decorated by the emperor. Consequently she felt the same way about the mayor's family as Jo-an did, and Jo-an shared many secrets with her. With a peasant face and broad shoulders, waddling on her bound feet, Tangma was Jo-an's one unswerving dutiful servant, solicitous for Jo-an's food and clothing and welfare. Jo-an trusted her as she would have trusted her own father. When he was living here a year ago, the three of them had felt like a little peaceful close ménage of their own.

"Shiaochieh, you have come back," said Tangma.

"Look, Tangma," said Jo-an, touching the plaster on her neck, "I was in a street fight with the police and got hit. That was why I telephoned you I was not coming home yesterday."

Tangma drew a long face and came to examine the wound. Jo-an showed her the bruise on her knee, and told her about the fight.

"How could they do such a thing!" exclaimed Tangma, clicking her tongue.

She was not satisfied until she had washed the knee and had bandaged it carefully.

Jo-an was limping into bed when Chunmei came.

Chunmei was a young woman of twenty-eight with a pointed nose, prominent cheek-bones and vivacious eyes. From the way she was dressed, one would have thought her a young mistress in the family. Her hair was cut short and had a permanent wave and she was in a black satin gown, well-moulded around her graceful body. She had tireless energy and always made a point of coming over to talk with Jo-an as the only other young woman of her generation in the house. Now she announced her presence as she came up the steps by saying: "Third Aunt, I am glad you are back. I heard from Tangma you were not coming home yesterday."

She saw Jo-an limping and said: "Tsenmo? What has happened?"

"Sit down, Meichieh," said Jo-an, patting the bed. She addressed her as 'Sister Plum' because she was higher than a maid and the mother of the mayor's children.

Chunmei sat on the bed. Jo-an thought for a second and said: "Meichieh, I want to change places with you at the dinner-table tonight." She showed her the bandage behind her ear. "I don't want my uncle to see this."

"How did you get hurt?"

Jo-an had to tell her the story.

"That is easy," Chunmei said. "You fluff your hair down. The old man won't see it." Chunmei always referred to Tu Fanglin as a *laotoutse* behind his back. *Laotoutse* was a term more rudely familiar than the term 'old man', but not quite as disrespectful as 'old fogey'.

"He was asking about you last night. I told him you had to stay in college for some meeting." She flashed a wink at the

young girl. "You give me the watch. I will have it sent out for repairs."

Jo-an was grateful. Chunmei, in charge of the household, was always able to do things for her and save her expense. Chunmei continued: "You don't have to thank me. Isn't the Tafuti property owned by your father as well as your uncle? I don't think your father need think that he is taking money from his brother. The old man likes to grouch, but we are all sharing the ancestor's money. I never saw two brothers so unlike. Even if your uncle makes all the money, the money comes from the lake property. The proverb says: 'For catching thieves and hunting tigers, one relies on one's blood kin.' Your father is proud, I know, but he is a scholar. Isn't it an honour for the family to have one brother a scholar and another a business man to make money?"

Jo-an felt shy about talking to Chunmei about the young man who had helped her to the hospital, though she did not mind telling Tangma.

Chunmei rose to go and said: "I will see about the seats at the table tonight. The old man is taking a nap. I slipped in to have a chat with you. Now I must go back."

As Chunmei left, Jo-an could not help admiring the charm and ability of this woman who was illiterate and legally only a maid in the house, but who had, by her own personality, risen to a position of great importance in the family.

* * * * *

The following week, Tu Fanglin, Jo-an's uncle, was sitting in his own room reading a newspaper after supper. The second court was designed like other houses, with a parlour in the middle and two rooms on the sides. These side rooms consisted of double chambers separated by a wooden partition, for houses built in those former days were spacious and thirty feet deep. The wife's room was on the west, and the master's room on the east, while Chunmei slept with her children behind the master's room.

Mrs. Tu was a woman approaching fifty, reaching that middle age when a woman of her position could feel secure, well-housed, well provided for, and yet only gloomily comfortable. She had raised two sons for her husband. The oldest one had

been drowned at the age of sixteen one summer in the Sunganor lake. Then her second son Tsujen went abroad. He was now grown-up and married and had chosen to live separately, a fact which she found hard to accept. She had thought she would be surrounded with grandchildren in her old age. But there were no young voices in the house except for the boys born of Chunmei, and they were not her real 'grandchildren', although they had been taught to call her *popo* (grandma) and the mayor *kungkung* (grandpa).

The way that Chunmei, the young woman, had taken hold of her house and grown roots in it, and then proved herself too useful to be dispensed with and too clever to be defied, had hurt her deeply. Only one good thing was that her husband did not bother her any more. Chunmei was respectful to her, which made her the more helpless. She did not read. She used to go out to mahjongg parties or to have one in her house, but lately she had suffered from neuralgic pains and did not go out much. In her spare hours, she would open her trunks and look at her things and her husband's things, and then do a little household supervision, which was really superfluous since it was so well done by Chunmei. She knew she had lost the battle with the young woman.

Tu Fanglin was sitting under a desk lamp in a long mahogany lounge chair made in Canton. Tu sat there while Chunmei took up her sewing in the back room, unobtrusively, but at his beck and call if he wanted anything. He had become more and more hopelessly dependent upon the companionship of Chunmei. He was appreciative of her young charms. He felt good and relaxed when she was near. Sometimes he excused himself by thinking that a man, after working so hard for the public good, must have a little personal enjoyment. It was his good fortune that Chunmei had come his way and he greatly marvelled at her talent and his own luck. He could not have found a more charming and clever and useful mistress. This was a situation which had developed by itself, a situation which was anomalous, but decidedly comfortable for him.

He called to her. "Chunmei, would you like to go to Tisanlou and hear a famous girl drum singer from Peking? I have received four complimentary tickets for tomorrow night. There was a write-up about this girl in the newspaper."

Chunmei said she would love to go. "Will popo go?" she asked. She knew that the wife was in bed with neuralgic pains.

"I don't think so."

"I should like to go with Third Aunt and the children."

"You young people go. The place is not good for young children. Ask Tsujen and Sianghua to go with you in our car. I want to ask them to come over for dinner tomorrow night. Telephone and say that I have something to talk with Tsujen about. Then you can go together to the performance."

She telephoned to Sianghua, Tsujen's wife, who was delighted. She had been bored ever since she came to Si-an.

When Chunmei came back, Tu showed her a letter he had just received from his brother.

"My brother is crazy. He writes such an angry letter for nothing. He is angry because I am making money."

"What is it about?" asked Chunmei. She made it her business to follow all that was happening in the family.

"Oh, about the Mohammedan neighbours on our lake. He thinks we ought to demolish the dam to let the water go into the Mohammedan valley."

Of all affairs in the family, Chunmei least understood the Sunganor Lake. She knew only that it was where the salt fish of their business came from. She had never been there. Every time Tu and his wife had gone, she had had to stay behind to look after the house.

There was also another reason for Mrs. Tu to leave her in Si-an. The ancestral temple was at Sunganor. Mrs. Tu never wanted Chunmei's presence at the ancestor worship in which the young woman would participate as a regular member of the family. This would have created a delicate problem. The young and clever Chunmei would probably outwit her on the strength of being the mother of the 'grandchildren'. Mrs. Tu had never yet won a bout against the maid.

Chunmei had seen the master laugh every time he received a letter from Jo-an's father about the dam. She knew that the dam was causing a lot of trouble to the people at Sunganor as well as between the brothers themselves.

"Tell me something about those Moslem neighbours," she said now. "What does Jo-an's father say?"

Tu Fanglin knew that Chunmei was a capable woman in

managing the household, but he had never discussed with her the big problems of policy. How to handle the Moslems was something for him to discuss with his son, but it was too complex for a woman's intelligence to grasp. So he smiled and said: "Do not worry your pretty head over such matters."

Chunmei was mortified, but she kept quiet.

Tsujen and Sianghua came to dinner the following night. He was a square-faced young man, short in stature and well-built. Like other progressive young men in Si-an, he was wearing a navy-blue serge Chungshan suit closed at the collar. A gold fountain-pen stuck out prominently from his coat pocket. Sianghua was smartly dressed in a tight-fitting modern gown and her thin face was carefully rouged.

Tsujen had come to talk business with his father. He could not understand why the young women were so enthusiastic about listening to a drum singer. He never cared for music, Oriental or Occidental. While he was studying at New York University, he liked to go and see the show at the Roxy Theatre. Once he had been taken to hear a concert at Carnegie Hall and had squirmed in his seat, feeling as if he were being compelled to listen to an hour-long lecture in an unknown language and yet afraid to go out before the end. Tonight he had condescended to go because Sianghua so much wanted to go, and he was modern enough to know that it was a husband's duty to go with his wife to an evening party.

When his father mentioned the uncle's letter in the middle of the dinner, Tsujen read it.

"This is just foolishness," he said. "It is only logical to have the lake enclosed if we take the fishery business seriously. We have raised the level of the lake almost ten feet since I had the dam built. The volume of water has been greatly increased and we are getting bigger fish every year. Our salt fish is now selling as far as Taiyuan and Loyang. The business will continue to expand and we can afford to put in as many young ones as we like. They multiply by themselves if they don't escape down the river. I don't see what Uncle is worried about. I got the county magistrate to post a notice at the dam, warning that violators of the property will be prosecuted strictly according to law. A few soldiers will take care of the Moslems."

"That is just what my father is afraid of," said Jo-an. "He

says soldiers don't stop wars, but they start them. He does not believe we can protect the dam by force, out there in the mountains."

Tsujen eyed his cousin with a quick, half-condescending smile.

"Jo-an, your father is a great scholar. But he does not understand business."

He said it politely, not to give offence. Jo-an knew that the dam was his pet idea—his first money-making idea which had worked since he came back to join his father in business. She did not want to get into an argument with him, and merely said: "I have heard from my father that grandfather saved Sunganor from bloodshed because he did not rely on soldiers."

Chunmei listened attentively but did not say anything. Sianghua never took any interest in her husband's business. Jo-an's mind was intent on going to hear the drum singer. In Peking she had loved to listen to these story-tellers, who had a special profession, the presentation of song and music and the telling of stories combined. O-yun came from Peking. Besides, Jo-an had read a review of the girl's performance by one who signed himself 'Fei'. As soon as dinner was over, they all got ready to go to the Tisanlou tea-house.

4

THE ROWDY, SLIPSHOD APPEARANCE OF THE TEA-HOUSE WAS THE same as ever—bare walls, exposed wooden pillars that should have had a new coat of varnish years ago, discoloured tables and benches, a dark unused staircase at the side. But there was a difference in atmosphere, and a greater proportion of well-dressed people were among the audience. The newspaper reviews had been uniformly enthusiastic about the drum singer. The audience was always better on Saturday nights, when the students were there and the clerks and bureaucrats of the government offices and the Railroad Administration took their families out. The tea-house was doing unprecedented business. The proprietor watched the people coming in and his face was creased several times over in smiles.

Li Fei and his friends had come early and they had a good table a few feet from the stage in the centre. The arrangement was unusual and the other guests surmised that important people were coming when they saw several tables marked 'Reserved'.

The proprietor himself came to greet Fan and his friends. Fan had been busy. There is nothing like the feeling of having helped somebody to make you want to help him more. Fan had first gone backstage to introduce himself because he had wanted to see Miss Tu by arranging for complimentary tickets. Then he had brought reporters to see the drum singer, and as a result of the publicity O-yun was becoming a great success. The tea-house had been packed full night after night, and her engagement was extended for a fortnight. The headline above this momentous news was printed in the same black type as that of the arrival of Lord Lytton in Shanghai, and was read more avidly. Tourists and grey-uniformed soldiers swelled the audience. One of the things a visitor to Si-an must be taken to see was a performance by Tsui O-yun.

Li Fei was keyed up, hoping that he might see Jo-an again. It was Fan who first saw the Tu party coming in.

"There they are, the young Tu and his wife."

Li Fei turned and looked. A stylish young woman with a high coiffure was in front. A little behind her walked the ex-mayor's son, an overcoat in his hand, coming in in the style of an entrée at some grand ball. Behind them walked Jo-an, dressed in black, and a beautiful young woman, prettier than the other two.

Li Fei remembered having met young Tu at a party in Shanghai some years ago. Tsujen, introduced to him as a grandson of Governor Tu Heng, was four or five years his senior. Then he heard that this young Tu had gone abroad to study. Li Fei did not think that Tsujen would remember him.

Jo-an was dressed in a simple black satin dress and wore no jewels except jade ear-rings. She was talking busily and happily with the mysterious pretty young woman.

Li Fei's heart pounded with excitement. There was something in the mixture of cultivated ease and gay enthusiasm in the girl's face which especially appealed to him. He pointed out Jo-an to Fan.

"You should thank me," said Fan proudly.

"Who is that pretty woman talking with her?"

"I have never seen her." Fan considered it his duty to know all Si-an society and felt ashamed not to be able to answer.

Li Fei was sitting with his back to the party coming in. When they filed past him, Jo-an caught sight of him and her face reddened quickly. She made as if she wanted to speak but held her words, and proceeded to sit down at her table. She whispered to Chunmei excitedly and then rose from her seat and walked over. Li Fei quickly got up.

"Mr. Li, how are you?" There was an overflowing gladness in her voice which she did not try or care to conceal.

"I am fine. And how is your injury?"

It was just like that. They talked like old friends. Her eyes surveyed him as if to make sure that the man she had met a week ago was a reality. His hair was brushed back and there was the same waggish smile, the same sprightliness in his eyes.

"I thought you would come. Did you get the complimentary tickets?"

Jo-an's eyes glistened. "Was it you who sent them?"

Li Fei nodded. "I have been wanting to see you again, but I didn't know how. My friend Wenpo knows the manager and we took the chance. I thought of ringing you up about it, but dared not."

He turned to introduce his friends. Fan pulled a grave face as he always did and stood up and bowed. Chunmei and Sianghua were looking on. Tsujen was looking elsewhere, seeming not to want to be bothered. A student returned from America, he looked a little out of place in the tea-house surroundings.

Jo-an returned to her table and explained to the others who it was that had sent them the tickets. She did not repress a lurking smile in her eyes and lips when she looked across at Li Fei's table.

Soon the other tables filled up. The proprietor came up to greet the honoured guests and then came over to Li Fei's table and said to Fan: "Fan laoyeh, Miss Tsui wishes to thank you and ask you to name the story you would like to hear."

Fan looked to his friends for suggestions. Li Fei said, nodding towards Jo-an: "Ask the young lady at the other table what she would like to call for."

Jo-an's back stiffened in surprise as the proprietor approached her.

"Yuchoufeng," she said loudly.

By this time Tsujen's attention was attracted. Glancing at Fan, he asked Jo-an who the people at the other table were. He had forgotten what the Yuchoufeng story was. It was one of the rarer pieces.

Miss Tsui appeared in a blue satin gown, with very tight long sleeves. Her hair was fluffed and curled in the new fashion. In front was a small drum, twelve inches in diameter. She received the usual warm welcome, Fan applauding with the rest. Her father in his shabby faded blue gown was tuning up the stringed instrument. Glancing for a moment at the people at the reserved tables, she announced the title of the story and said it was given by special request.

Slowly and quietly she began, her rich, round voice easily carrying across the big hall. Yuchoufeng meant cosmic madness. It was the dramatic story of a girl who refused a throne. The first emperor of Tsin, the builder of the Great Wall, had died. The good crown prince had been exiled because he had protested against the father's tyranny. Premier Chao had forged the emperor's will and put the second son, a dissolute young man, on the throne. To cement his power over the young emperor, the premier wished to present his own daughter to him as queen and the emperor had given his approval. The premier's daughter, however, knew that the people were groaning under the tyranny and the empire was falling apart. She knew that the good prince had been killed by a forged edict. She could not very well refuse when the emperor himself expressed the wish to take her as his wife. Only by a ruse could she foil their plan. She feigned insanity.

Miss Tsui's interpretation of the part of a madwoman was good. She did not know her parents. She spoke in suggestive, lascivious language and laughed hysterically. The world had become topsy-turvy for her. Brought before His Majesty, she became madder than ever. Her drum-beat became faster. She poured out a long tirade against His Majesty as only a mad-

woman would dare, insulted him and laughed. What had the emperor done with his brother? Why was he killed?

At times she was reflective and tender, at times her throat was taut with anger. The young emperor was angered and threatened her with death. The mad girl went on laughing, floating about happily in a dream world of her own. The emperor was convinced that she was stark mad, and decided not to make her his queen. Miss Tsui finished with hysterical triumphant laughter.

At each line, when the premier's daughter pointed to the tyrant and berated him with a cold, biting sarcasm, the audience applauded. Miss Tsui was emotionally convincing while her words flowed with a moving, stirring eloquence.

Jo-an was visibly moved and she shouted her acclaim at the end. She had been really carried along. While the audience murmured their admiration, she looked over at Li Fei.

Miss Tsui took a drink of water and sat down, trying to recover her breath. She spoke a few words to her father while the audience murmured, then got up and went on to tell another story. She already had the whole audience with her. They appreciated every gesture, every swift turn of her head and every nuance of her voice. The mere tapping of the small drum, with her expert touch and subtly varied rhythm, was a joy to hear.

Li Fei listened only half-heartedly. Jo-an was now more lively, no longer absorbed in rapt attention. She sat very erect in her seat, and leaned forward a little so that she could see him. Above her simple black dress her white face had the glow of youth. He half wished he had the courage to go over and sit beside her, but her table was crowded and he held back because of Tsujen's evident dignity. Li Fei had a perennial dislike of being polite to self-important people for fear of being misunderstood.

The girl finished another brilliant performance to deafening applause. The ushers circulated to sell oranges, pears, peanuts, and sweets. The room had become hot and Jo-an was waving a white handkerchief to cool her face.

There was a long interval when there was nothing going on on the stage, and the tea-house was doing its best business of the evening. Tsujen was getting impatient. He took out a

cigarette, fixed it to his gold-rimmed cigarette-holder and cocked it at an angle.

The tea-house was a public place. Anybody who paid twenty cents for his ticket had the right to go in. On the nights when O-yun appeared, it might be more appropriately described as holding a crushing, jostling crowd than an 'audience'. For such a crowd of all classes, especially with the many retreating soldiers foot-loose in the city, the audience was unusually well-behaved.

Fan Wenpo was not a man content with half measures. His wing of protection spread far and wide and practically covered the tea-house. The roof was solid and waterproof, but occasionally there might be a rain of fisticuffs. But Fan was a 'grand-uncle', that is, the third degree of a secret society allied with the Red Spears of Honan. Secret societies penetrated the lower social strata, and houses of public amusement, where there were always rowdies, usually had someone connected with one of the secret gangs to protect them.

Li Fei beckoned to Jo-an, as there were some empty seats at his table. Jo-an got up and came over with Sianghua. While Li Fei talked with Jo-an, Lang spoke to Sianghua.

Chunmei had not come over when Jo-an asked her to because she knew that it would be awkward for her to be introduced.

"Who is that pretty lady sitting with you, Miss Tu?" Fan asked.

Jo-an looked at Sianghua and answered hesitatingly: "She is the nurse of my uncle's grandchildren."

Lang was talking to Sianghua about his interesting visit to a Mohammedan mosque in the city that dated centuries back to the Mongol Dynasty. He was telling her how the Moslems came to Si-an from Central Asia in the Tang period a thousand years ago. Sianghua had never seen the inside of the mosque because her husband was not interested and she dared not go in alone. She was fascinated.

Li Fei was monopolising Jo-an's attention.

"Let me look at your watch."

Jo-an showed it to him. Her hand was white and slim. "It is going," she said, glancing at him happily. "I have had it repaired."

"I am glad you lost it. You might have gone back to the

college with the other girls and I wouldn't have met you. It is yinyuan (destiny)."

The girl's eyes looked into his. "Do you believe in destiny?" Her voice was a soft murmur.

"Perhaps. I don't know. Lots of things happen to us that are outside our control." He fell into an easy, chatting tone. "I like to believe in it. Destiny pulls the strings, and we do not know a thing about it. That makes it more exciting. The god of destiny is a humorist. He loves little tricks, dirty little tricks, and he laughs while the boy and the girl suffer torments. Then he twists the strings, and they come together. When a boy and a girl get engaged and marry off smoothly, Destiny is not interested in them. Sometimes he is a good mocker, too."

Li Fei's eyes rested on her. He liked the way she had come to him and had said simply: "How are you?" She blushed a little. He was a good talker and she was fascinated.

"Tell me why you called for Yuchoufeng."

"I saw it once in a play and the story has always stayed in my mind. Some stories leave me cold, but I was quite moved when I saw the play."

"I can tell you why. There is a good prince and there is a bad prince, the usurper. The premier's daughter was in love with the good prince. That was why she went mad."

"Why, I thought exactly the same thing! The story is never told quite that way. Then she should have gone really mad. I am glad you thought the same thing."

"We are both right." They both laughed. Jo-an glanced at the others happily. There was a childishness about Li Fei.

"Can I see you again?" he asked her.

"Yes."

"I wouldn't dare to call at your house."

"You can telephone and ask for Tangma."

"Will you be able to come out with me to a restaurant for dinner?"

"I can come, but not for dinner. My uncle would miss me. I would hate to have to explain."

At the other table Tsujen was getting restless. He paid for the tea, threw a dollar note on the table and nodded for the ladies to leave.

Sianghua was not quite willing to go and ignored him. He

came over officiously and tapped her on the shoulder. "Come on," he said. Sianghua was vexed and went on talking.

At this moment there was a sudden noise near the entrance. A soldier who had drunk too much *peikan* and had missed hearing O-yun was pushing his way to the front.

"O-yun, O-yun, come out! Your *laotse* (daddy) commands you."

The audience clapped and roared.

"Hey, O-yun, come out!"

The manager approached. "She has sung twice already and she is tired."

"Does she not know her daddy? You'll see whether she comes out or not."

The drunken soldier drew a revolver from his belt and fired towards the stage. There was an uproar and consternation in the audience.

Fan, who had been watching, stood up and threw a glance at his 'nephews' posted about the hall. With a toss of his head, he said: "Throw him out."

The soldier was craning his neck, staring at the stage. From behind something metallic cracked over his head and he collapsed as if his knees were made of dough. The brothers of the society took away his pistol and dragged him out. The nervous audience breathed again and began to disperse. Some shouted: "Good work!"

Tsujen had already started out and the ladies were following him. Chunmei, as she passed, glanced quickly at Li Fei's friends. They stood up to smile good-bye. Li Fei said to Jo-an as she passed close to him: "Were you afraid?"

"Not exactly," she replied. "Luckily the soldier was thrown out."

She cast a lingering glance at him as she left.

5

THERE WAS A BIG CROWD OUTSIDE THE TEA-HOUSE WHEN THE Tu family left. Tsujen had suffered. He had been abroad and had seen better amusements than this monologue form of story-

telling. He had come only because of his wife. There was no ventilation, the air was bad, the unshaded lights glared in his eyes. When he came out, he breathed the clean air and felt better. The air was cold on this February night. Tsujen drove the car up to the entrance for the ladies to get in. Some beggar boys with gunny-sacks thrown over their rags for warmth crowded around them, begging for pennies. When Sianghua opened her handbag Tsujen was a little nervous. He never approved of beggars, on principle. "Don't give to beggars. Get in and let's get out of this place."

Sianghua closed the handbag and got in the front seat, quite upset. Jo-an and Chunmei climbed into the back. Tsujen slammed the door, went to the other side, and climbed into his seat. The crowd still stood gaping at the long, black, slick body of the Packard. Tsujen flashed the headlights and tooted the horn. It was not a toot; it was a four-note melody of *sol-do-re-mi*. The engine coughed a little, then settled into a steady purr. His car sang again. He stepped on the accelerator and swung the car so close to the bystanders that a few beggar-boys leaped away in fright.

"Oh, heavens!" Sianghua almost screamed.

"We shouldn't have come to such a place."

"You might have killed somebody."

"I never have."

Tsujen was glum. He thought it useless to argue with a nervous woman. The glare of the headlights searched the street, illuminated a few straight but narrow alleys and they were on the big road again. Most of the shops were closed. In the dark nobody spoke, so that they could hear the steady hum of the engine.

Tsujen stopped the car and lighted a cigarette. Sianghua inclined her head to look at him, but would not say a word.

"I don't see what there was to it," he said. "It is not singing and it is not drama. And the story is insipid."

"Everybody enjoyed it except you," said Sianghua.

"I am crazy about it," said Jo-an. "I could come and hear it again and again no matter what story she was telling."

It had always been a trying struggle for Tsujen to like the city he had come back to. Having been to America and taken courses in Business Administration, with capital letters, he was impatient

with the sloth and inefficiency around him. He was even doing his best to help make this a modern city. In all Si-an, his office had the only set of olive-green steel cabinets and filing cases and a swivel office chair. But that was only the beginning of his trouble. He had to train old-fashioned clerks to get used to filing-cards. Having had the card system installed, he found there was no index system in the Chinese language, none that was workable for ready reference. He cursed the Imperial Kangshi Dictionary. He could not find the words 'it' and 'do' in it. The word 'do' (wei) was originally a picture of a monkey. How was he to know its etymology? The word 'willing' (ken) had a part shaped exactly like a 'moon' radical. He found it under 'meat' because originally the character meant a 'meat joint'. He was convinced that the Chinese script should be abolished. His clerks messed up his filing-cards and went back to their old record books.

When he thought of his courses at New York University in accounting, publicity, and business promotion, he grunted in despair. His salt fish was still transported from the Sunganor lake by pack trains and horse-carts and river junks because of the absence of a railway. There was a mysterious factor in him, in the Tu blood. If he found himself out of place and did not fit Si-an, he was going to make Si-an fit him. He would modernise the roads. That was why he had started a cement works. He had recently been putting on weight and seemed to have a lot of energy to use up. He had not wanted to come to hear the monologist. He found it not even disappointing, but exactly as he thought it would be—a primitive, ungarnished, and, he might almost say, a semi-barbarous presentation.

He drew a sigh and remarked: "You should have seen the Roxy Theatre in New York, the lights and scenery and the precision of the dancers. And you are never kept waiting a single moment. Everything is timed to the second."

He always warmed up when he talked about America. Then he talked with faith and conviction.

There was no response from the party in the car, and he stopped. He was talking over their heads. He felt terribly lonely.

Sianghua had shown no response because she was upset and because she had heard her husband warm up about America

too often. There could be no conversation because she had not been there. She could only listen. She was prepared for it whenever he was disgusted with anything in Si-an. Normally Jo-an would have asked questions about anything in America, but her mind was not there. She was thinking about Li Fei and of what he said about Destiny, especially that Destiny was a good mocker. The car made several turns and drew up at the entrance of their home. Tsujen let Jo-an and Chunmei out and drove on to his own house.

When Chunmei got out of the car with Jo-an, she looked in the gatekeeper's room to see that everything was in order and to smile a good-night to the gatekeeper.

The gatekeeper, Old Wang, a man of fifty who had been with the family for thirty years, looked up and said: "Meichieh, you people have come back early."

"Yes. You can lock up now. And don't forget about the side gate of the western court."

"I shan't, Meichieh."

Old Wang had seen 'Miss Plum' come into the service of the Tu family as a young maid of seventeen and had seen her grow into a position of influence and indispensable usefulness. She had been liberal with doing small favours, had helped to cover up some of his mistakes, and he was grateful and happy to serve under her now. For instance, the previous night he had forgotten to lock the side gate. Chunmei had discovered it and spoken to him directly, but had not reported it to the master.

She went with Jo-an into the first court, where Tangma was sitting alone waiting for Jo-an's return, said good-night to them and went in to the second court where the master and his wife lived.

She went first to her own room to see that her children, Tsuen and Tsutseh, boys of nine and seven, were sleeping peacefully. She took off her jewels and her party dress, changed into a cotton gown, and went into the kitchen to see if the medicinal soup had been served to the master at ten, according to her instructions.

Tu was talking in his wife's room. When Chunmei came in, she walked to the edge of the bed and asked: "Popo, is there anything you want? I can make a cup of tea."

"No, now that you have come, you can both go," said Tsaiyun. "I want to go to sleep."

Against Chunmei's flawless courtesy Tsaiyun was helpless.

Chunmei, with her young figure, her busy steps from morning till night, her attention to all things great and small, had become like a dominating spirit in the house. Without schooling, she remembered the dates when rents were to be collected and when accounts fell due. She was in many ways like a young daughter-in-law who had taken charge of the house, except that she shared the master's bed. She knew how to deal with the master, placate the wife, and win the good-will of the cousins. The servants of the house feared her because they could not deceive her, and respected her because she was just and did not assume airs. She was willing to do household work herself, and refrained from scolding other servants and thus kept everybody in his place. The wife found it necessary more and more to assert her authority by being harsh with the servants. By contrast, the servants liked Chunmei more than the proper mistress. Her position may be classified as 'ambiguous'. It was due to no fault of her own. She was not too happy about it, but she was doing very well indeed.

* * * * *

The rise of Chunmei was a tribute not only to her own personality, but also to Tu Fanglin's practical genius. The fiction was still held in public that the ex-mayor had taken no concubine, which gave rise to the confusion of terms of address we have witnessed so far, and which the reader must have wondered at.

When Chunmei came to the house of Tu, she was seventeen. She was a girl with an attractive figure, and she had more brains than most girls. By the time she was eighteen, she had become even more attractive. Tu Fanglin, for all his concern about public morality, was attracted by the young girl's beauty and intelligence. He showered gifts on her, made her serve him, and away from the glare of the public, who adored him, he made advances.

Normally, in the days of the Empire, when the master had a child by the maid, she would automatically be taken as his concubine. Tu Fanglin, however, had always been a defender of

public morality. As a modern progressive mayor, he had denounced concubinage. He could not very well take a concubine now, yet he did not want to disinherit a child of his own blood. He secretly wished that he had not put himself on public record as against concubinage. But there was that child, Tsu-en, coming. He hastily had Chunmei married off to his gardener and adopted the child, to continue the line of his deceased eldest son. This meant degrading the child by one generation, but he had also to think of the altar fire of his eldest son. He therefore made the young child call him grandpa. He had always wanted to have the status and dignity of a grandfather. He was then already forty-eight. If Tsucheng had been living and had married, Tu would already have become a grandfather by this time. He put Chunmei in the room next to his, as the child's nurse. The gardener did not like it at all. But Tu Fanglin had saved himself from a scandal, had made his child legitimate and had promoted himself.

When, in another two years, Tsutseh, the youngest one, was coming, the situation was no longer tenable. He gave the gardener three hundred dollars and told him to get himself another wife. The gardener spurned the offer and quit his job. "Such an unpractical man," Tu Fanglin had said to Chunmei. "Where will he find three hundred dollars again?"

The wonderful thing about it was that Tu Fanglin made himself believe that he was, to all intents and purposes, his sons' grandfather, by just repeating the word *grandpa* in referring to himself every day. This made it somewhat confusing, for the two boys born of Chunmei had to call their own brother Tsujen *uncle*, and Jo-an *aunt*. Mayor Tu was not bothered by it, but was quite pleased. The nomenclature of *aunt* and *uncle* and *grandpa* somehow filled the spiritual structure of a house of three generations, which otherwise consisted of only two.

"My brother makes the rules of the game as he goes along," Jo-an's father had once said to her.

The giving of names was also indicative of his talent in exploiting the Governor's name. The four sons' names all began with *tsu*, a reference to Governor Tu Heng. They were Tsucheng ('Grandfather's Rectitude'), Tsujen ('Grandfather's Benevolence'), Tsu-en ('Grandfather's Boon'), and Tsutseh ('Grandfather's Gift').

"In the case of Grandfather's Boon and Grandfather's Gift," said Jo-an's father, "they are gifts of himself, from himself, by himself, to himself."

Chunmei was a maid, but she was a woman, no matter by what name you called her. In the old tradition, she would have been a concubine and would have worn trousers, not skirts. The trouble was that the modern woman had suddenly changed in the nineteen-twenties from wearing jackets and skirts to flowing long gowns. There was no tradition that concubines should not wear long gowns. Chunmei once playfully suggested that she would like to have a gown made. It was becoming fashionable and was so much more graceful to wear a gown. Tu Fanglin liked the idea and approved of it. His wife still wore jackets and skirts. That subtle change in costume, like the adding of a stripe on a soldier's uniform, was fraught with great and, to the wife, grievous consequences. It not only made Chunmei prettier and modern, but it confused the whole issue of superiority and inferiority as between wife and a maid-concubine-who-was-not-a-maid-and-not-a-concubine. The wife receded a little and Chunmei advanced perceptibly in authority.

In the first years, when Grandfather's Gift and Grandfather's Boon were very small, Chunmei used to stand at table and serve the master and mistress. One day Chunmei was cutting a dress for the mistress. The wife was nervous about something. Tu Fanglin had tended to sleep more in Chunmei's room than in her own room. She was grumbling. Everything Chunmei had done that morning was wrong. She had forgotten to change the towels. The water spilled over the table when Chunmei put the jug down. Then she had to change the jug. By the time everything was ready, the mistress found that the water was tepid and not really hot.

"You little witch, yatou, and fox spirit!" said the wife, whose name Tsaiyun meant 'Multicoloured Cloud'. (Women's names are often so deceptive.) "If you are not willing to serve, don't. You've forgotten where you came from. Where would you be if I had not taken you, you guttersnipe! You glue-eyed spirit of a she-fox made to charm away the souls of men by your lascivious . . ." The rest was unquotable.

Chunmei swallowed all the insults and apologised. Now the mistress's eyes were watching her, and the scissors in her hand

faltered. Multicoloured Cloud blew up. "You idiot and imbecile, predestined enemy of ten thousand generations!"

She snatched the scissors from Chunmei's hand and repeatedly stabbed at her arm. That night Chunmei cried in bed. The situation was no longer tenable. She begged Tu Fanglin to let her live separately with her two sons.

The next day at lunch Chunmei was standing behind her two little children, still serving as maid, with her arm bandaged.

"Chunmei," said the master. "Sit down at the table."

Chunmei gasped in surprise.

"Chunmei, I order it. You are my grandchildren's mother. You take a seat with Grandfather's Gift and Grandfather's Boon from today on."

Chunmei sat down timidly. Multicoloured Cloud's eyes blazed. She knew this was her husband's indirect reproach for what she had done.

Another line of demarcation between wife and concubine was obliterated. To the master, she was 'Tsutseh's mother'. To her mistress, she was still 'Chunmei'. To Tsujen and Jo-an she was 'Meichien' or Miss Plum. To her own children she was their *Amu*, which was merely a dialect variant for 'mother'. It would have taken the Lawyers' Association of Shanghai or the College of Jurisprudence in a first-class university to decide, in the case of the mayor's death, whether Chunmei was or was not legally a part of the Tu family, since she was never married into it and could not bear the Tu name.

All this was years ago. Things accepted, that one has got used to, never seem strange. You just stop thinking about them. Chunmei's wounds healed and after a few years the scars on her arm became almost invisible.

The imperceptible advances of a woman in a man's favour are as stealthy as the coming of the tide or the creeping of the forest. Every spring brings the forest nearer the fields. By the time Sianghua arrived in the family, Chunmei had not only begun to use cream and rouge, but had even cut her hair short and curled it like a modern woman, all of course with the enthusiastic appreciation of Tu Fanglin. Tu felt gratified. He had a sense of private triumph and revenge against a society which forbade him to take pleasure in women other than his wife.

Tsaiyun saw what was happening. In revenge she hired a beautiful young maid. The new maid did not last long. Chunmei saw to it that she did not last long.

When Sianghua first came to the family, she could not get used to it. To Sianghua, a modern college-educated woman and from a good home in Shanghai, where maids know their places, it was an insult to make her sit at the same table with the maid. Sianghua, moreover, was outspoken. It was Chunmei's real ability that pacified Sianghua and won her over to her side. She called Sianghua *Ershen* (wife of Second Uncle), following her children. She insisted on being humble and serving Sianghua like a maid. When Sianghua's bowl of rice was finished, it was she who with her ever-alert eyes first saw it and stood up to fill her bowl. Since Sianghua was new in the city, Chunmei had taken the time to take her out shopping and to familiarise her with the best shops, always smiling and calling her Second Auntie and carrying her parcels for her.

* * * * *

At dinner that evening Chunmei had known from the talk between father and son and from Jo-an's look of irritated concern that there was something very wrong going on in the Sunganor Valley, causing a dispute in the family. She had held her tongue and merely listened because she did not know anything about Sunganor. Tu had not cared to discuss it with her.

The next day she came to talk about it with Jo-an.

"The old man received that letter from your father about the Sunganor dam. I don't understand what is causing all this exchange of letters between your father and your uncle."

Jo-an explained, and said that her father had asked her to go up to Sunganor during the spring vacation.

"I haven't seen my father for almost a year, but he has written me about it, too. Tsujen had the dam built after he returned from America, as you know. The Moslems live on the northwest of the lake, in a valley that depends on the water coming down from the lake. When the dam was built, the level of the river went down. My father says the Moslems' fields suffer from lack of water and there is a lot of bad feeling and resentment among the people of the valley."

"I see," said Chunmei. "Second Uncle built the dam to

keep the fish from escaping down the river, of course. You remember we heard him talking enthusiastically about it when he was living here. He thought it a great idea."

"There were always plenty of fish before the dam was built, without our having to cut off the water from the Moslem valley. I think it is mean and wicked and selfish. My father writes me privately that the dam is going to cause a lot of trouble."

Chunmei tried to picture the situation. "It does not agree with the style of our family to deprive our neighbours of water, I think."

"What does my uncle say?"

"He says that your father is crazy, that he knows what he is doing."

"I have heard my father tell me stories of Moslem revolts in Sinkiang. He must have serious reasons for worry. You have no idea what it is like out there. To the north of the lake it is all Moslem territory. There have always been bloody Moslem revolts out there."

Jo-an told Chunmei the story she had often heard from her father of how the grandfather once saved the Sunganor from a terrible rebellion. It had always been a tricky, explosive situation, leading to racial riots and slaughter. She had heard many interesting stories too, about Tso Tsungtang, who gave the Sunganor properly to their ancestors.

Governor Tu Heng had inherited the office and the Sunganor estate from Jo-an's great-grandfather, who was an assistant to General Tso Tsungtang in suppressing the great Moslem Rebellion of 1864-78. The Kansu Moslems had overrun the two north-western provinces and had even captured Si-an itself. The revolt spread over all of Chinese Turkestan, now called Sinkiang. It was led by the famous Yakub Beg, a Turki General.

Tso was a great soldier and statesman, the first one to successfully colonise Sinkiang with Chinese. He made his army plant trees as they pushed farther west towards the desert of Hami and cultivate fields on the desert border as a secure base for food supply. In order to introduce silkworms, he made his soldiers' wives carry sheets of silkworm eggs in their armpits or breasts. It was said that some of the silkworm eggs hatched before their arrival. His soldiers carried willow saplings along with their arrows and oilcloth umbrellas. To this day the willows along

the road to Hami in Chinese Turkestan are still known as *Tsokungliu*, 'Duke Tso's willows'. It was an epic achievement. After the suppression of the Mohammedan Revolt, Jo-an's great-grandfather received the title of Governor of the South Kansu region, with the Sunganor lake as his private preserves. When he died his son, Tu Heng, inherited his office and title and the lake property.

But while Tso was a great administrator, he had been ruthless towards the tribesmen. He thought the thousand-year-old problem of the north-west border with its dozen tribes of Turkis, Kirghiz, Tsungari Mongols, Kasaks, Tartars, with periodic massacres and religious riots, could be solved only by colonising it with Chinese and compelling the tribesmen to change their religion and adopt the Chinese way of life. He killed priests and demolished temples. After the rebellion had been put down by force, with a large-scale wiping out of whole villages and towns, the native tribes were subdued, but they remained hostile and resentful, and after his death revolts started again.

The Sunganor region, like the rest of the North-West, was sparsely inhabited by Tibetans encamped in the Minshan mountains on the south, with their fortress-like lamaseries, while, on the north, the rich valley of the upper reaches of the Tao River was inhabited by the Moslems of a Turki tribe who spilled over from the north for trade and agriculture. The Chinese soldiers under Tu Heng were apt to behave towards the Mohammedan inhabitants like conquerors. When cases of plundering or killing the native tribes came to his notice, he disciplined his men severely. There was the question of fishing. The Mohammedans wanted to fish in the lake because they needed the fish for food. Governor Tu Heng allowed them, although strictly it was his private property. He did not do anything spectacular, but he had won the good-will of the tribes by giving them justice.

When the Moslem revolt of Sining took place in 1895, whole Chinese populations had been massacred in reprisal for the Chinese cruelty under General Tso. The Mohammedan sea surged forward, wreaking destruction. The innocent victims numbered practically two hundred thousand Chinese and Moslems, all told. There was danger of the revolt spreading to South Kansu. Tu Heng called the Moslem Ahun to his office, told him of the general situation, and looked at him

straight with a calm face. The Moslem priest smiled, and Tu Heng patted the priest on the back in a friendly gesture. Without a word on either side, the whole region was saved from a terrible slaughter, a fate which overtook the other regions.

Chunmei was properly impressed. "I don't see what makes Second Uncle so keen and tense and energetic all the time. There is a hard glitter in his eyes, and the muscles of his face are always tight."

"You feel the same thing, too? I think he is very pleased with what he is doing. He must have learned that tense and energetic look from America. And he eats so fast, as if eating was business, too. Of course Uncle is pleased that he is helping to expand the salt fish business."

* * * * *

Tsujen and Sianghua had taken a house in the eastern section for various sound and valid reasons, although to be the grandson of Tu Heng and not live in the ancestral mansion with his parents was a breach of loyalty and most unfilial behaviour in his father's eyes. The house had a small garden and was close to neighbours, but it was modern with white walls and green shutters. One valid reason was that it had an enamelled bath and white tiles half-way up the bathroom walls. Tsujen had a shower fixed and liked to think he was back in the United States. He always gave himself a vigorous rub-down. His stripped body was not very presentable and he always splashed water all over the floor, and Sianghua was always horrified. She could not understand why, possessing a bath, a man would not sit quietly even when bathing himself.

That night, coming back from the tea-house, Sianghua went to her room and undressed, feeling that she had had a good time, but conscious that the evening had been spoiled. It was like being thirsty and while you were drinking a glass of water somebody snatched the glass away from you. You had a drink, but not a full drink, not a satisfactory drink. Tsujen was making money all right. Since his return from abroad, he had taken over the management of his father's business and was developing it with vision and what he called 'aggressive tactics'. He saw the new era coming. China was going to have more motor roads and new buildings. They all spelled cement. He was

making good headway and was fast becoming one of the prominent rising modern young men of Si-an.

Tsujen slept in one room and his wife in another. He went to the refrigerator and looked for his bottle of imported White Horse whisky. His wife did not drink. She danced very gracefully, but they had not danced for a long time. There was not a single decent dancing-hall in the whole of Si-an, and there were few occasions to dance.

The refrigerator didn't always work. It coughed and stopped and, when he had given up, started to work again. There was some defective wiring and nobody in Si-an could fix it. It would be too costly to ship it back to Shanghai for repairs. Tonight the ice-cubes did not form. But the night was cold and he could go without ice. He liked to have a highball before he went to sleep. Very nobly, he thought, he had sacrificed himself and come back to work for his home town and his country. Whisky without ice!

"Can I come in?" He knocked on his wife's door. He had all the manners of a Western-educated person. A true Chinese husband would just walk in. He always opened the car door to let his wife get in, and he walked with her on the correct side in the street. It was a habit, but it did not change anything. Sianghua did not feel that he had true respect for women. The act of opening a car and letting one's wife get in first does not guarantee tenderness, the tenderness in a man that a woman's heart craves. Sianghua had discovered that a man could study abroad for years and have all the modern education, but his ideas of womanhood would still be the same. We have no right to expect that a graduate of New York University automatically becomes an ideal husband, that wearing a collar and tie automatically keeps a man from being a boor. But Sianghua had entertained, like many other modern people, a somewhat exaggerated idea of the benefits of a Western education and a trip abroad.

"You go to bed. I am tired," said Sianghua from the other side of the door.

"I just feel like having a talk before slipping into bed, darling." The sentence was in Chinese, but the 'darling' was in English. Sianghua spoke sentences of conversational English tolerably. What had happened to that word? It was still the same English

word. It had sounded so tender and wonderful—a sound that could fill a woman's heart—when Tsujen was courting her, but the same word could also become stale and plebeian, deprived of music.

"You go to bed." Sianghua was always brusque to him. She spoke like a wife who had been married for two or three years.

Tsujen turned away and felt more lonely than ever.

She had already undressed and let her hair fall over her shoulders. Her shoulder-blades showed, for she was thin. There was a strange glow on her cheeks—not the heavy rouge she had put on, but a suffusing warmth. She studied her face in the mirror. Marriage to her had seemed like eating half-baked buns, one side soft, the other side raw and mealy. She took immense pride in her dress and her jewels. She always looked at her jewels before locking them up, and she hung her dresses carefully in the wardrobe. Then she changed into fur-lined slippers and slipped under the silk-covered padded quilt. It was a bed with shining brass rods. She turned off the light and saw the white line of light below the door of her husband's room.

The thin line of light prevented her from going to sleep. She was still nervous from hearing the gunshot at the tea-house. She heard her husband pace the floor restlessly in the next room and chuckled to herself. "It serves him right. If he had not behaved like such a boor at the tea-house, I would have let him come in."

Did her husband love her still as passionately as he had once loved? He seemed to need her, to want her, and certainly he provided her with comforts. But just so he would need and want and provide for any other woman who was his legal wife. For Tsujen, a student of Economics, was not romantic, but meant to be a good, conventional husband and a respectable citizen. Rather early in their marriage she had discovered a certain opaqueness in the man she had married, as if his mind had developed in only one direction. He could not see certain things that she felt intensely about. He had set out to make a good home, by which he meant a good solid house, good dresses for his wife, and presentable cooking when guests came to dinner. But he never cared for fine, delicate food himself. He would not be able to tell whether a soup was ham-flavoured or not. These things just escaped him. Human nerves are like

photographic plates; some are fine-grained and can catch all the nuances of colour and tone, and some are coarse-grained. He had good appetite and enormous energy. But he would be incapable of appreciating the lilting rhythm and beautiful enunciation of O-yun. He heard only noises and voices that conveyed some meaning, or should. Some of the words of the girl storyteller were flowery, redundant, airy nothings—and he got impatient. He had kept away from literature, was afraid of it as a matter of fact. Nor could he understand why his wife should open a handbag and take out money and give to some shivering beggar boys in the street. He had said he disapproved of beggars on principle. It encouraged indolence. On a cold night, the beggars just died frozen on the roadside.

Solidity and respectability were his private ideals, and cleanliness, progress, and cement were his ideals for China. "What China wants is cement," he had said a thousand times to his wife. "Why, in America the cement roads are so clean you could lie down on them and not get dirty."

She had met him in Shanghai. He had just returned from America with all the glamour of a Western-educated young man. Sianghua had graduated about two years before. Though his skin was dark and coarse, he was squarely built and flawlessly dressed. In every way he had the look and air of a sound, competent, proper, serious, ambitious young man. Sianghua had been swept off her feet by his talk about himself and about America. To be married to a man who had studied abroad was to belong to the modern set, to be in the fore-rank of modern society. Sianghua felt she could not find a better man. They had had a wonderful two months in Shanghai, dancing almost every other night in some brilliant, gay night club, meeting his friends, travelling to Soochow, Hangchow, and Wusih, and had finally settled down in their home in historic Si-an.

In marriage, a woman usually makes discoveries of two souls. First, her husband's. The innermost depths of a man's thoughts and secret ambitions lie bare and exposed, with no possibility of subterfuge and hiding as in society; a human character with all its limitations and weaknesses, its pet prejudices, its egotism, and its blindness of the most varying sorts. And she usually discovers her own soul, finds herself, her destiny, the purpose for which she was born. The second discovery dates from the time

her baby is born. Sianghua had discovered her husband's soul and character, but she had not yet found her own.

She had been lost after she came to Si-an—fabulous, unknown Si-an—where Li Po and Tu Fu and Yang Kweifei lived, where Emperor Han Wuti ruled and conquered as far as Turkestan, where battles were fought and dynasties changed hands and palaces burned for months and emperors' mausoleums were plundered. Tsujen had not been of much help. She had heard of Tangkung and Hancheng, the ruins of the Tang and Han Palaces just outside the city, but she had never seen them. Her husband had discouraged it. "There is nothing to see. Just some mounds and villages." She had read at college about the Nestorian Tablet, over a thousand years old, established by Nestorian Christians who came to China and lying in a temple just outside Si-an. She had not even seen the Nestorian Tablet. Her husband was in fact unaware that it was there. He always protested that his line was Economics.

Lang had been talking this evening about the Christians, the Turkis and the Persians who came to Si-an in the Tang Dynasty. Lang told her about the *Poszekuan*, the special quarter where the Persians lived in the Tang Dynasty. As he spoke about it, he communicated to her his own enthusiasm. He was telling her how he and his friends had one day saved six panels of ancient carvings, which were being used as pavement in a poor man's courtyard, daily stepped upon. Each panel had a carving of a full-length feminine figure, evidently Persian. The women wore overcoats and hats and upturned shoes. "Incredible," Lang said, "they look like Persian hats. Those tablets must date back to about the eighth century." At this moment, her husband had come behind her and tapped her lightly on the shoulder and said: "Come on. Let's go home!" He had not that extra consideration to sit down and wait for her to complete the conversation. That was not in him. If he had sat down and waited, he would not be interested in what Lang was talking about, even if the drunken soldier were not there.

Sianghua saw the light under the door, tossed about in her bed, and at last fell into sleep with the feeling of having eaten half-baked buns or potatoes.

If she had had a sweet baby sleeping by her side, cooing to her, she would not have had that vague empty feeling. It takes

the little fingers of a baby to turn the knob and open the flood-gates of a woman's potentialities. No one had turned that knob for Sianghua. The doctors said Tsujen could not have a child.

6

JO-AN'S HEART WAS POUNDING WHEN SHE TOOK A RICKSHAW TO the Tsuisianglou restaurant near the railway station. It had been raining and the rickshaw was well covered in front, allowing a strip of light above eye-level for the passenger to see the street. It gave her a good, comfortable feeling of being unobserved, though there was nothing wrong in having an appointment with Li Fei. It was late afternoon, and she had slipped out by the side gate. She had to get back for supper. He had seen her several times at the college, had talked to her on the telephone, but had so far never taken her out.

This was the first time she had gone out seriously to meet a young man. Her heart quickened as she arrived at the restaurant. Li Fei had been extraordinarily frank with her at the tea-house. She liked the way he talked, as if they had known each other for a long time. That was his way. She liked also that playful sparkle in his clear, open eyes. And he had talent and an independent spirit in his writings, as was evident from his essay on 'Kow-towing'. She liked a man who loved to travel, who took his life with a laugh and who stood out above the level of all the staid and placid and merely competent 'salary-earning' young men she had seen. She had received many sentimental letters from young men, some known and some unknown, and the mere sentimentality had disgusted her.

She got down from the rickshaw and entered the restaurant in her red cardigan overcoat, looking about with restrained excitement in her face. Li Fei was waiting for her and quickly stepped up to her, helping her take off her coat.

The back room looked out on the railway yard. Fifty yards away was the railway station. The rain had slackened down to a drizzle. Passengers and porters were moving about on the platform and a locomotive was chugging along slowly on a side

track. Jo-an felt more comfortable when she saw the open view, though they were entirely alone.

Jo-an placed her handbag on the table and glanced at him.

"When do you have to be back?" he asked.

"Before seven."

"I am glad." He rolled his words slowly. "May I call you Jo-an? I hate to say Miss."

"Please do." On the surface she was really more excited than Li Fei.

"And you call me Fei. I phoned you because I am going up to Lanchow and I wanted to see you before I go."

Jo-an's eyes flashed in surprise. "How long will you be away?"

"That depends. It is a trip I asked for myself from my newspaper. I want to see a bit of the border and get a foretaste of Sinkiang. I always dream about that unknown world."

"You are restless, aren't you?"

"I love to travel and learn and find out about other peoples and races. Here, I make a commitment with you. If you will promise to see me again, I will hurry back in ten days. I can go and return by plane. The newspaper will pay for some of it. That is the benefit of being a correspondent. I can't afford to pay for all of it myself. I am a poor man, not like you."

"I am not so rich, either. The Kuomintang confiscated my father's property."

"It must be wonderful to have such a father," said Li Fei.

"I think so. I adore him. You know he is a royalist." Her eyes were looking straight out of the window.

Li Fei called for soup noodles.

"Yes, I read some of his writings. You must have learned a lot from your father. As we say, you are from a 'book-perfumed family'."

"You know the book perfume is mixed with the stink of salt fish. My uncle is the 'Salt Fish King'."

Li Fei laughed as she rattled on. "Of course I hear a lot of stories about Kang Yuwei and Liang Chichao from my father. Do you like Liang's writings?"

"He is not bad."

"Whom do you admire most among the modern writers?"

Li Fei was both pleased and surprised. He should have

expected that question from a daughter of a *hanlin*, but he had to remind himself of it. She had simply fascinated him as a young intelligent girl with dreamy eyes and heavy lashes.

"The Chiayin School," he answered incisively. "It is a pity the magazine was not continued. It is the only style that combines classic elegance with modern cogent, logical reasoning. The trouble with the classic style was that it was never exact in its reasoning, always lost in generalities."

This was a surprise to Jo-an. It was like discovering a common love. The Chiayin magazine had long gone out of existence. Naturally it had no imitators, because nobody could quite fit it off unless he was extremely good in classical literature and at the same time had a really thorough Western logical training. Chang, the editor of Chiayin, was a student of law in England. It was only through her father that she ever heard of the Chiayin School.

"My father has the same opinion," she said.

It was a strange rendezvous for lovers. When she came to the appointment, she had expected Li Fei to make love to her. She would not have minded it.

The drizzle was still going on outside. After they had a bowl of soup noodles, he said: "Would you like to have a walk? I love to walk in the rain."

She hesitated. She hated to get wet, but she did not want to disappoint him, and they went out together. The day was short and the street lights strung out at long intervals. There was a smell of fresh soil and the fine mist of raindrops hit her face as she jogged on, hands in her pockets, side by side with Li Fei. She was discovering something about him. Walking in the rain seemed to stimulate his thoughts. He did not even attempt to hold her arm. He noticed a leaky drain-pipe on the road and he thought of his leaky water-tap at home.

"Western things are always better made. Lang does not believe in the Western civilisation, but I do."

She replied: "My father always says 'Chinese learning for the base, Western learning for the application.' He still believes in it. What do you think?" She felt anxious to find out how he stood with regard to her father's ideas. She had seen the alternations of light gaiety and deep seriousness in him.

Like all modern Chinese, Li Fei knew in his heart that China

was being confronted by a superior Western civilisation, superior in government, in machines, and in music, the drama and medicine. Unlike Lang, Li Fei believed in progress, in some adjustment being made. 'Adjustment' was a mild word for modern China. It amounted to a great social and intellectual upheaval, of man confronted not only with new things, but with new ideas. It always came back to the question, what was wrong with China, or rather, what should China do about it?

Two young minds wrestled with this momentous problem in the rain.

Li Fei was familiar with the phrase *Chung shueh wei ti, shi shueh wei yung*, a favourite phrase of Emperor Kwangshu's reformist party. Literally, it meant that Chinese learning should serve as the organ, and Western learning as the functions. It meant that we should keep the spirit of Chinese culture, while adapting the results of science and its applications to our daily use. It had also a slight implication that Chinese civilisation is spiritual, while Western civilisation is material. Let us keep the spirit Chinese.

"I don't believe a word of it," Li Fei replied. "It does not make sense. You can't separate an organ from its functions. When you admire a nation, you admire its products, the things it makes. But things are created by the human mind. You can't separate the things made from the mind that makes them. Don't tell me that the mind that discovers the radio is less spiritual than the mind that makes leaky water-taps. The idea is to read Confucian philosophy while you use Western soap and listen to the radio and send telegrams. We are the masters and the Western nations that make the telegraph apparatus and the soap for us are the servants. We are deceiving ourselves. Individuals can do it, but a nation can't. One cannot set up telegraphs without knowing electricity. It is a poor way to use a thing without understanding it. You can't even make the cables or a simple long copper wire without machinery."

"So you think China must change?"

"The question is idle. Take the simple question of water-taps or screws, or even sewing-needles or common nails. The Western needles and threads and nails and screws and water-taps are made better because they are made with machinery."

The common housewife does not care whether the needle is Western-made or Chinese-made. She simply wants a good needle. We cannot refuse to use them; we can only refuse to make our own. And we cannot know how to make our own unless we've got the mind that makes those things."

"I can't argue with you, but there is something in what my father believes. He always says: 'Damned is the nation that has lost its soul.'"

Li Fei had read her father's caustic magazine articles and was not unfamiliar with the argument.

"It is an illusion. No nation can lose its soul, if it has got a soul at all to lose. But we've got to make one thing clear. The man who uses soap instead of crushed beans is not necessarily less spiritual. There is a common fallacy that the man who takes a bath once a week is more spiritual than one who bathes himself every day. It is simply not true."

"But we can enjoy the modern comforts and remain spiritual. That is probably what my father means. He says let us use the enamelled bath, but let's not forget our way of looking at life."

"So far as material comforts are concerned, I don't think the West has anything to teach us. For sheer comforts, I'm for China. Nobody knows that we are a very material civilisation. The Western man who lives in a flat and uses a lift thinks he is enjoying comforts. He simply does not know what comfort means. It is better to live in a one-storey house where lifts are unnecessary. Don't tell me that the Westerners know comfort. They tie themselves up and strangle themselves with dog-collars and leather belts and braces, while we wear a house-gown and pyjamas whether indoors or outdoors."

"My father would love to hear you say that. Why don't you write a book about it?"

"I don't know. It is a rotten state of things to talk of a civilisation when an illiterate war-lord can rule over us and practically shoot anybody he likes. I should probably offend everybody if I should come out and say all that I think."

They had come near the office of the county administration. The sky was completely dark. They had been walking for more than half an hour and her legs were tired.

"I must go home now," she said.

He stopped and turned to her, hands in his pockets. "Must you really go?" he asked, as if they were in a drawing-room and he was the host.

"I really must. When are you leaving?"

"The plane leaves on Friday. I shall be back next week. You will let me see you again?"

She nodded, her eyes glistening in the dark.

"It's a promise, then."

He got her a rickshaw and offered his hand for good-bye. He could have kissed her then. Why didn't he? What a strange man, she thought. But she was excited by him. If he had merely said the usual sentimental things that many a young man says to a girl during such a walk, she would have been disappointed in him. She was glad he had not.

* * * *

February had melted into March. The morning sun shone through the window upon the lattice partition of Jo-an's room. The moving shadows of the trees showed her that the day was windy. On such windy days she always heard the tinkling of the small iron bells swaying under the roof corners of the main court, the sounds that she knew so well from her childhood. Those sounds had not changed; almost everything else had. From her pillow she could see the curving roofs of the main court and the little clay figures of bluish-green glazed cocks that stood on the edges of the roof. She was slightly near-sighted, but she saw them clearly in her mind because she used to look up at those cocks on the roof when she was a child.

This morning she was feeling happy and expectant and serious because Li Fei had come back from the trip and had rung up the evening before to say that he wanted her to meet his family. She heard Tangma watering the begonias on the porch. She had her breakfast brought to her, consisting of a big bowl of soup noodles, with two poached eggs and a slice of ham in it. She peeped out at the white wall fronting her courtyard. The wind was shaking the two tall pear trees where she could see tiny sprouts coming out on the branches, and she knew spring was coming. During the previous spring she had watched the pear blossoms come out and wither away and had heard the

same tinkling bells in her solitary courtyard, and had felt terribly lonely. This morning she saw the pear trees come into bud and her young heart quivered. She would not like to walk again on this windy day and she was glad that Li Fei had phoned her and they would be sitting inside.

When the telephone in her court rang the evening before she had run to it.

"I have just come home, this afternoon."

"How was the journey?"

"It was hard, but I enjoyed it. I would have stayed longer, but I thought of you." His voice was soft and ardent. "Jo-an, I want to ask you something. Do you mind meeting my mother?"

"I thought we were going somewhere to be alone. The peach buds are coming out in the southern suburbs. Why don't we go there?"

"Jo-an, please."

"Did your mother ask to see me?"

"No, I suggested it."

She hesitated. "I would rather not. It makes me nervous."

"You needn't be. It would mean so much to me."

"All right, then. I would love to see your home and see where you work."

She was to meet him in the late afternoon, and that was hours away. But anything was bearable when she could look forward to the meeting. She went out into the yard to examine the tiny buds on the pear trees and did not feel lonely any more. She was hoping that Li Fei's mother was going to like her and that the young man, apparently serious, would enter into her life and lift her out of the stretch of white weariness when the pear blossoms would be in bloom. Tangma watched her from the window and knew that she was in love.

* * * * *

In his brief stay at Lanchow, Li Fei had been able to get the story of the spreading revolt in Turkestan. The Moslem revolt, a year old, had broken out afresh in the Turfan area and, from all reports, threatened to gather proportions and engulf the whole of Chinese Turkestan.

The immediate cause of the revolt was that a minor Chinese

tax-collector had taken a Mohammedan girl into his house. Mohammedan girls were not supposed to marry outside their religion. Whether it was a case of love or of forcible abduction could not be ascertained. But there had been a background of smouldering discontent and disaffection among the Moslem people around Hami. The King of Hami had been deprived of his power, and the autocratic Chinese Governor Chin had started redistribution of land. Under this well-meaning phrase the Turkis in this region, who were Mohammedans and made up 70 per cent of the population of Chinese Turkestan, had been ousted and given poor land instead, and their own lands had been distributed in favour of Chinese peasants from Kansu and refugee farmers from Manchuria. The Moslems were sullen and defiant. It took a religious incident for the smouldering discontent to flare into a flame of destruction. When the Moslem girl was taken by the Chinese official, all Hami rose. It was said that the Moslem priests had decided that both the Chinese official and their own girl should be killed, which was done. Governor Chin drove the Turkis out of Hami, and the latter had retreated to the plains of Turfan. The Turki minister, Yollbars Khan, had appealed to the fabulous Chinese Moslem General Ma Chungying in Kansu for help. Ma had dashed across the desert to the rescue with five hundred cavalry, was joined by other Mohammedan forces, and had laid siege to Hami for six months.

The fabulous Ma, a young commander at the age of twenty-two, dubbed Kar Szeling or Young Commander by the Chinese, and the Angel of Death by the Moslem believers, had fought his way and threatened Urumchi itself, the capital of Turkestan. Then he had received a wound and had impulsively called off the war. He had returned to Suchow in north-western Kansu and plundered the base of the Citroën Expedition, its cars, tyres, spare parts and radio supplies. But other forces with which he was in touch were carrying on the war. The Chinese governor had closed the frontiers of Turkestan and little news could leak out.

Li Fei should have gone up to Suchow to interview Ma Chungying. At this time there were five Chinese Moslem generals, all by the name of Ma, and all related. Ma Chungying, the youngest and fiercest and most ambitious of them all, was

the big name among the Mohammedans. But Suchow was four hundred miles from Lanchow, and Li Fei had other occupations in mind. He had promised Jo-an to be back at the latest on the following Sunday.

It had been a dusty journey and he had ridden five days to cover the four hundred odd miles. The public bus went over hills and through passes, but after Pingliang the atmosphere had changed. When he left for Lanchow barely ten days ago, the landscape was still a wintry grey. The fields lay in white clods and the branches were bare. Now everywhere he saw wheat sprouts pushing up, some already a foot high. As the crowded bus rumbled past low red hills and fields and the many canal systems, he seemed to be dashing back, with imperious urgency, to the girl he had not seen for ten whole days.

At home he returned to his old familiar room. There was an old desk which used to belong to his father, with square brass handles for the drawers. On the wall was a small unpainted bookshelf, and several columns of books lay stacked up from the floor.

At supper he said to his mother: "Mother, may I bring Miss Tu to see you?"

"Who?"

"The girl I spoke to you about, the mayor's niece. I want her to meet you. You will like her."

Mrs. Li was a little abashed, because she was old-fashioned. In her days a girl would die of shame to come to a man's family even after she was engaged, not to speak of being introduced to the fiancé's mother.

"What shall I do? And what shall I call her?"

"You call her Miss Tu. You do nothing. You just treat her as a friend of mine."

His mother did want to see the girl her son was interested in. "Well, these modern days! But, Fei, I am glad. We ought to keep nothing from her."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean we are humble people. We have no stone lions in front of our entrance like hers. If she still likes you, after having seen our home, then she may be a good girl. You know we are not the kind of family for a rich girl to marry into."

He went back to his room and sat down to write a piece on

what he had learned at Lanchow. The Moslem revolt and the whole subject of Turkestan interested him. He pictured himself writing a series of 'Sinkiang Correspondence'. Everything would be fresh and new. Chinese Turkestan, now known as Sinkiang province, a territory the size of France and Germany combined and about one quarter of the whole of China, was completely shrouded in mystery.

He did not go to call on his friends the next day, for fear that he might be detained by them. He wanted the day to be completely free.

He went out to meet Jo-an in the alley. She found that she was led to an unpretentious but solid house. Her heart palpitated. This was not exactly the right thing for her to do and she was piqued by a sense of adventure. She thought that perhaps this was Li Fei's way of doing things, impulsive, unconventional, but with entirely noble motives.

The door was ajar. He pushed it open and called out: "Mother, Miss Tu is here."

Jo-an looked at the small paved yard, about ten feet by twenty. There was a kitchen extension close to the entrance, and two stone steps led to a covered landing half stacked with firewood and sacks of coal. Though this was the entrance, it was really at the back. The house had an east wing and a west wing which enclosed a small yard on the south, facing a wall which was the back of a neighbour's house.

Jo-an was aware of a young woman's face at the kitchen and some children's faces behind the barred window of the living-room.

Li Fei lifted the heavy padded screen. The light from the inner courtyard shone on a room which was clean but crowded with furniture. The blue carpet showed that it was, by Shensi standards, a better-than-average middle-class home. Li Fei noticed with a smile that his sister-in-law had put a new red velvet cover on the corner table, and a pot of fresh flowers.

"Well, this is our mansion," he said with a laugh.

The three children were standing near, the youngest barely three. The two elder ones, a boy and a girl, stared at Jo-an with their round eyes in great curiosity. Li Fei introduced the children to Jo-an and they began to giggle without taking their eyes off the guest.

"Please sit down," he said, indicating an old rattan chair lined with lambskin hemmed with black cloth.

Jo-an sat down uneasily. She saw the flitting shadow of a small young woman dashing past and disappearing into the room on the east. Some moments of low whispering passed before she saw a middle-aged woman coming out slowly, assisted by the young woman. She wore a black band across her forehead, studded with a square piece of green jade in the centre, and a small pair of jade ear-rings.

Jo-an immediately stood up.

"Mother!" said Li Fei, and hurried forward to help her. He knew before going out to meet her that his mother had decided to put on her best navy-blue woollen jacket with shining copper buttons. He had told his mother that this was to be a casual visit; but his mother, trained in the ancient manners of courtesy, could not help being formal towards a young woman visitor, particularly one in whom she had a special interest. Tuanerh, Li Fei's sister-in-law, had rushed in at the last moment to see that her mother-in-law's face was properly powdered and that the skirts were the right length above the ankles.

Jo-an stood looking at the picture of a happy, dignified mother walking between her son and daughter-in-law. It was a heart-warming picture. Old Mrs. Li held her head straight, her eyes looking at the young girlish figure. Jo-an began to blush, but she was glad now she had come to see his family, and thought she understood him better. She envied Li Fei for having a mother. Tuanerh glanced quickly at her.

"My mother, my saotse (sister-in-law)," said Li Fei.

Jo-an bowed and waited for the mother to be assisted to her seat before she sat down gingerly at her own seat.

"I know it is presumptuous of me to visit you, but your son asked me to come." Jo-an made her first effort at polite conversation and was not at all sure of herself.

The mother did not hear well with her right ear. She turned to Tuanerh and the latter repeated what Jo-an had said.

"On the contrary, we are greatly honoured by your visit," replied the mother. "You must excuse the appearance of our shabby hovel."

"Mother! Jo-an! If you are going to talk mandarin, we shan't be able to talk at all," said Li Fei.

"You must not mind my son," the mother said. "He does not know the rules of courtesy. It is true that our house is not a decent place to receive a girl like you."

"My mother will apologise for our unworthy shack," he said playfully.

"Come, sit here, Miss Tu," said the mother, pointing to a chair on her left. "My right ear is not very good. We can talk better that way."

Jo-an's uneasiness was gone. The mother's delicate features showed in spite of her wrinkles and she had a simple, clear look in her eyes. Jo-an was no longer afraid of her. Tuanerh went to the kitchen to bring tea, and her children, who had clung to her, came and surrounded their grandmother. Li Fei took a chair close by.

"What was I saying?" the mother asked.

"You were being honoured by the young lady's visit, Mother," said her son. "Begin over at the unworthy shack again."

The mother looked fondly at him and said to Jo-an seriously: "You really must not mind his rudeness. He is not bad at heart if you know him well."

"He was very kind to me," replied Jo-an. "He helped me when I was hurt."

"Yes, he told me that was how he met you." The mother's words were slow and clear.

"Mrs. Li, you have a very clever son. He is very famous."

"I know he is clever. I don't know that he is famous."

Li Fei stood up and went to the kitchen.

"Saotse, I want to help. Tell me, what do you think of her?"

"She is a sincere girl, not stuck up as I thought she would be, like a girl from a rich family." Tuanerh was a shopkeeper's daughter, her husband was doing well in business, and she considered herself very lucky. With her three children and a maid to help, she was running the household happily.

Li Fei took a rag from the tiled stove and began to polish the corners of the old teapot, which had a chipped lid. He came into the parlour with a tray in one hand and laid the tray on the table slowly and began to put down the cups and saucers.

"You should have used the good teapot. We've got a new one," said his mother.

"Mother, it's all right. Every teapot gets chipped in time,

doesn't it, Jo-an? We have used this teapot in the family for over ten years."

"I don't want our guest to think that we haven't even a good teapot in the house."

Li Fei poured the tea, offered a cup to Jo-an and then served one to his mother.

"Don't be upset, Mother. There's nothing wrong with an old teapot." He bent over his mother and let his hand rest gently on her back.

Li Fei's niece and nephews were naturally affectionate, and now Ing, the elder girl, came and resting her body against Jo-an's chair and fingering her tresses said: "How pretty your hair is!"

"I curl it," Jo-an answered, looking down at the young child.

"I would like my mother to have the same curls you have," said Ing.

Tuanerh came in with a plate of hot steamed paotse (buns with meat stuffings). She was followed by Lima holding another plate. The children rushed towards the sweet-smelling steam. "Children!" their mother shouted, and then served the paotse to the guest.

"Here," she said to the children, "one for each of you."

"We have nothing delicate to offer you," said Mrs. Li.

"You don't know how much I am enjoying myself," Jo-an replied.

Ing nibbled at her paotse slowly, knowing that she would have only one. But Toi, the boy of three, devoured his in two or three mouthfuls, no matter how small his mouth was. Jo-an had not touched her bun yet, and the little child came and stared at it.

"You are not eating it," Toi remarked with puzzlement in his eyes.

"Come away, Toi," shouted the mother. "Don't be greedy. You won't be able to eat your dinner tonight."

Jo-an looked at Toi's disappointed face as he trotted away.

"Here, Toi," she called. "Let him have it just for once." Toi came back and his plump little hands slowly closed in on the offered bun, and he turned with triumphant joy on his face.

"I am ashamed of my children," Tuanerh said.

"You have such a happy family," the guest replied. There

was a look of wondering delight in her eyes. She had craved for just this kind of small, warm and happy family.

The room was now full of feminine chatter. Mrs. Li asked the young guest about her family, and the children added to the noise, but Ing stood silent by her mother and listened.

The hour passed easily, then Jo-an stood up and said she must go.

"May I see your room?" she asked Li Fei.

He led her to his large room in the western wing of the house, looking out on the inner courtyard. She glanced around at the desk and the stack of books on the floor. The desk stood at the farthest corner, next to the window. The window paper was rolled up and the sombre light of the late afternoon fell upon the desk, cluttered with books and papers. She saw a copy of *The Fragrant Concubine* lying open on the desk.

"You've been reading up on Sinkiang," she said, letting her fingers trail along the desk-top. "And you still use an oil lamp?"

"I used it in childhood and I still like it. I like the smell of the kerosene and the bad air. It stimulates me."

Jo-an laughed. "You are queer. It is quiet in here."

"Not so quiet until the children have gone to bed, as you can see."

When they left the room, the mother was waiting for them, and Jo-an thanked them for the party.

"I will walk half-way with you," said Li Fei.

Outside in the alley, he turned to her. "What do you think of my mother?"

"You are lucky to have such a kind mother. Anybody would like such a sincere woman."

"I am so glad. I was so anxious."

"About what?"

"That the two people I care for most in this world should like each other."

She blushed. He had said it quite naturally. She cast about for something to say. "I envy you for having such a family."

"Yes, it is a little crowded and noisy and a little bit crazy. My saotse is a simple woman, too, but she is quite contented."

"That is what I picture a home should be like. Mine is like a mausoleum, beautiful on the outside and cold and empty within."

They walked on. The light of the evening softened the uniform grey of the alleys and the neighbours' houses. Crows were circling in the sky. A few stragglers were coming home after their day's work in this deserted section of the city. The warm, soft spring breeze caressed their cheeks and some peach branches loaded with pink blossoms peeped out at them over the walls.

While they walked on, Li Fei spoke of his trip to Lanchow and his desire to see the frontier tribes.

"They fascinate me," he said.

"If you want to see them, you should come to Sunganor. The lake is beautiful and there is a lamasery near-by. And you can see chickens and dogs prowling on the roofs."

"That sounds interesting," he said as he called a rickshaw to send her home.

"Did we disgrace ourselves?" asked his mother, as he returned.

"No, Mother! You don't know how beautiful you looked."

He was tall and his mother was short. He placed his hands on her shoulders and looked down at her adoringly. She shook his hands off and said: "*Tsch!* I am an old woman. You shouldn't have brought out the old teapot."

He laughed. From the corner came Tuan's silvery voice. "Miss Tu is a very pretty girl."

Li Fei went happily to his room.

Book II

THE MANCHURIAN GUEST

7

O-YUN HAD BEEN TRAINED FROM CHILDHOOD AS A SINGER AND story-teller because her father was in the profession. The social status of actors, actresses, and musicians was low. They married among themselves and children learned from their parents. These artists and musicians ranged all the way from famous actresses to high-class sing-song girls and to common entertainers. Brothers and sons, if they showed no talent for music, took to boxing. Theirs was a closed world. The entertainers and the boxers were often on the road, and were called 'guests of lakes and rivers'. Their place was the stage, the mule-wagon and, sometimes the dinner-table of rich men's houses. A delicate distinction was held between 'selling body' and 'selling professional skill'. This line was difficult to draw and was, no doubt, sometimes trespassed in the course of the social contacts of the profession, which was governed by its own code of respectability. A girl singer's body was supposed to be inviolate, and the first occasion when she was to receive a man was a subject of negotiation and was celebrated with a feast proportionate to her fame.

O-yun had been taught by her father and her mother, who was now dead, but who had been a singer in her own right. She had shown great talent at the age of thirteen. The 'big drum' monologue was a relatively free vocation, not being dependent on a troupe. O-yun had good hand gestures and a vivid, imaginative gift of presentation. She told Fan that she had left Peking the last spring and had gone to Mukden, where she remained for several months until she was driven out by the Japanese. Peking was not very safe either and she had gone

down to Nanking. Then the war developed around Shanghai and she was driven out again. She was, in a true sense, a war refugee.

O-yun and her father, familiarly called Old Tsui, were grateful to Fan. Fan considered Miss Tsui his *protégée* and he took pride in inviting his friends to see her or in giving her small dinners. He protested that his intentions were entirely honourable, which in this case was true. O-yun was a sprightly young girl with doe-like eyes, happy now with her success, but innocently so. Fan was at his place in the tea-house night after night. He and Lang and Li Fei had gone to hear her again and Lang, in his quiet way, was fascinated by her. Fan had gone to see her alone several times and Lang had questioned him, worried because Fan had ways with women.

"Oh," Fan said, "I am old enough to be her father. I am only proud of my discovery. My interest in her is entirely limited to my devotion to her art."

It was Fan's way to talk charming swagger, though he would go out of his way to help his friends. Lang wanted to believe him. Not that Fan had any high ideal of womanhood. He frequented the red light district, but he always gave his friends sound advice. "Don't get involved with family girls. If you want women, there are plenty of them around. But never get involved with family girls who will some day be wives, and you'll never have any trouble. That is my principle."

Fan had another principle, which was to 'obey the laws of nature'. Whenever he said he was going to obey the laws of nature, Li Fei and Lang knew where he was going and they left him alone. Towards O-yun, however, he took a protective, almost paternal attitude.

That night, after the drunken soldier had been thrown out, Fan had felt very noble when he went in to see O-yun and her father, with Lang. He put his hands on the girl's small shoulders.

"Were you afraid?"

"*Tsen-m-pu?*" she replied, giving that phrase ("Why not?") an entrancing intonation.

Old Tsui poured two cups of tea, his hands still shaking when he offered them to Fan and Lang.

Then he poured tea for his daughter and himself. While he drank his tea, his eyes glanced sideways at Fan.

"We were lucky to have Fan laoyeh's presence there." The father had a way of avoiding saying 'you' when speaking to Fan. "When there are so many soldiers in a tea-house, something like that often happens. But it was fortunate that Fan laoyeh was there."

The girl flopped down wearily in an upright wooden chair, flung her arms on the table and rested her head on them in a gesture of complete exhaustion. Monologue story-telling could be exhausting work. On a summer night, she would have to change her underclothes after such a performance. From the way she performed her job, with complete grace and perfect rhythm, her listeners might think it pleasant work, for she had told these stories so many times. It was not so. Her nerves were taut, her senses all co-operating; she must believe in the story she was telling, and every syllable and gesture and voice and drum had to be timed perfectly.

Lang watched the girl's hair moving up and down with her arched back, her white hands stretched out on the table. The father filled the bowl of his long pipe slowly, stuck its jade mouthpiece to his lips, lighted it, and began to puff.

"Fan laoyeh," he said, "we father and daughter owe so much to you. I think if Fan laoyeh is willing, O-yun ought to be your adopted daughter."

"O-yun," said her father. "What about a little dinner?"

O-yun slowly withdrew her arms and raised her head. "Tsen-mo?" she asked sleepily.

"We'll have a little dinner. I have asked Fan laoyeh to be your adopted father."

"I wanted to invite you out, anyway," said Fan.

"She is tired," said Lang. "Why not let her sleep and get rested?"

O-yun rested her chin on her hand, her eyes staring blankly, and said, "I am all right," and rose from her chair.

Downstairs, as they went out, they saw two men standing at the entrance. They were harmless-looking civilians, but the collars and chests of their gowns were unbuttoned. They came up to Fan and grasped his hands. A secret signal had been passed.

"Good work," said Fan. "I don't need you now." He slipped two dollar notes to one of them.

They went into a small restaurant near-by and chose a room upstairs. The waiter recognised O-yun and held the door-curtain for her to pass. The room was lighted by an electric lamp hanging from the ceiling, with a plain white porcelain shade. A square table covered with a white cloth stood in the centre, while three or four hard-backed chairs with small black varnished side-tables were lined against the wall.

The night was warm and Lang went to the window, opened it, and stared out into the night. The waiter came and poured jasmine tea into individual cups.

O-yun was used to late dinners and she soon recovered. Fan sat down and studied the menu. Now and then consulting the girl, he wrote down dexterously a number of dishes, studied them, made a few alterations and gave the paper to the waiter. There were fish-maw soup, lima beans fried with bamboo shoots, sauté chicken wings, minced perch cooked in chicken fat with pickled soya beans (the *pièce de résistance*), and salted Nanking ducks and preserved eggs. For wine he ordered Tientsin wuchiapi.

"Jushui! What are you doing over there?"

Lang turned round. His Persian lamb hat made in Siberian style, which he had bought from Harbin on his way home, made him look taller than he was. "Nothing. I was looking at the roof-tops in the night." He came and took a seat at the square table.

Lang looked at O-yun, playing gaily with one chopstick in each hand.

"It must have been hard on you. I heard your voice falter for a second in the last story."

"Did you hear that? I just went on to the finish and I thought the audience hadn't noticed it."

Then the father said again: "Had it not been for Fan laoyeh, there is no telling what that drunken man might have done."

"Don't worry," said Fan. "Our 'brothers' cover the place every evening." He turned to the girl. "As long as I am in the city, you are safe. Nobody will dare lift a finger against you."

O-yun looked gratefully at him. "We sisters of the profession are not afraid of street ruffians. We see them every

day and are used to them. In Peking we have our own men, of course. People of the 'rivers and lakes' respect each other. We are only afraid of officials and officials' sons, the *kungtscho-cr.*"

Her white hands were lying on the table. Lang's hands covered them in a gesture of protection.

"To think that a young girl like you should be exposed to ill-mannered ruffians."

"When you know them, they are not so bad after all," said O-yun, her eyes dancing a little. "If you can return a fist for a fist, you can go about freely, and nobody will do you any harm. There is nothing crooked about them. The world is so big. Where there are entertainments, there are naturally young dandies and rowdies. You may not like their garlic, but they are people out to make a living and have a good time like ourselves. Unless you are a greenhorn from the country, or don't know the rules and try to put something over them, they don't bother you. The difficult people to deal with are the bastard sons of the officials and the rich families."

Lang smiled. "You seem to know a great deal for a young girl."

"I have grown up on the rivers and lakes. We eat this kind of rice. We sisters of the profession will go a hundred miles over a deserted mountain with one of these rowdies, but we won't be safe for one night with a gentleman in the same room."

Her words contrasted strangely with her small young face and her innocent round eyes.

"You mean you will not trust us!" said Fan with a smile.

"I don't mean you, Fan laoyeh and Lang laoyeh." She giggled. "If I meant anything of the sort after you have done so much for us, I would be less than a dog in sense of gratitude." She knew how to speak to the higher-class gentlemen.

"There," said Fan approvingly. "But don't flatter me. Would you dare pass a night in the same room with me?"

"I would."

"You mean I am not a gentleman?"

Her brow knitted. "You are a good teaser. You have read so much. I cannot chew words with you. I mean you are a real gentleman."

"Shame on you," said Lang to Fan. "A girl has had a hard evening's work and wants to have dinner, and you start to quibble over her words."

"Thank you," said O-yun, "I wouldn't say that. Since we came to Si-an, we have been lucky to meet you people. A girl can have worse encounters. If we were annoyed by a little friendly repartee, we might as well give up the profession. I only regret that I haven't read as many books as you."

"How many characters do you know?"

"It is hard to say. I must know a couple of thousand."

"You do?" Lang showed surprise.

"We have to learn the chap-books and the texts. One gets to know the faces of the characters. After a while you recognise them, and see that it is always the same vocabulary."

"How many stories can you tell?"

"About fifty."

"You must have a prodigious memory to remember all the lines."

"That is our rice-bowl. I don't understand how you scholars turn out volume after volume. How can you have so much to say, after the sages of the past have said it already?"

Fan had been chewing the cut pieces of dried Nanking duck. The wuchiapi had warmed his intestines, the delicate minced perch had caressed his palate, the slippery chicken wings had moistened his throat, and he felt relaxed and comfortable.

Old Tsui poured another round of wine. "To Fan laoyeh," he said, raising his cup. "I am serious about what I said. O-yun, drink a cup to your adopted father."

"You know I can't." O-yun took a sip and set the cup down. "I really can't. It is not the heart that is not willing, but the tongue is in the way. If you ask me to drink tea, I will drink three large cupfuls to show my respect."

"Wait a minute," said the father. "If you are really to be Fan-laoyeh's adopted daughter, you should go up and make three bows."

She sidled up to Fan and, with her hands pressed against her body, made three deep bows.

Having performed the bows she walked back to her place, took up a tea-cup and, pouring herself three cups in succession, gulped them down one after another. "There, kantieh!" she

said, calling him by the expression 'dry father' (signifying no blood relationship), and, showing her empty cup, sat down happily. It was all very informal.

"According to custom," said the father, "O-yun should come to your house and let you put a red string in her hair."

Lang poured a round of wine, stood up and said simply: "To O-yun!"

The girl glanced at him quickly.

"You should have said some compliments to my adopted daughter," said Fan.

Lang's fine, sensitive face coloured a little in the lamplight. "I haven't anything to say. And what is the use of saying anything? There is only one O-yun in the world. You do not gild the lily."

O-yun's eyes gave him a merry twinkle. Her delight at the compliment was unfeigned. She was enjoying professional success and she was now secure.

* * * * *

Lang had been charmed by O-yun's freshness and vivacity and her mixture of urbane polish and naïve simplicity. In Paris he had lived with a girl who worked in a florist's shop delivering flowers for clients. The girl continued to work at the shop and he had admired that touch of independence in her. When he came back to China the fashionable women palled on him. He had been looking for a girl who had fun and spirit and did not cling to a man. The usual social intercourse irked and irritated him and, retiring from society, he had sought to find beauty in common surroundings. He always thought the poor people were the more genuine. His artistic training had sensitised him to see a divine form in a poor girl in the street, even when she was covered with rags. Now he admired the beautiful structure of O-yun's head, her lithesome figure, all her quick, direct gestures and her forthright speech. She seemed to him like that girl he had known in Montmartre: carefree, independent, cheerful while making her living, and sometimes as saucy as a nymph. He always thought poor girls brave because they had gone through so much and were not afraid of life and could deal with men on a basis of equality. He had seen behind this girl's pleasant manner towards him

and his friends a suggestion of pride and aloofness, and this fascinated him.

One day Lang and Fan took O-yun and her father to see the peach flowers of Tuchu in the southern suburb, which were just come into bloom. The weather was mild with the first soft breath of spring. The Chungnan hills were clear and blue in the distance, and all the way up to the foothills the country was a riot of pink blossoms, the peach trees stretching for miles. The whole region had been celebrated by the wanderings of China's greatest poet, Tu Fu.

They had come to the bank of the Pa river some three miles from the city, and the party stopped to take a rest. O-yun sat on the grass, crooking her legs on one side. She was wearing a pink and black cotton print dress with long, narrow sleeves. The sunlight danced in her hair, making it a fluffy, silken brown rather than black.

Brought up in the city streets and public squares, O-yun was always at home with men. She was not unaware that Fan and Lang were young men and that Lang had been especially attentive. But this did not make her for a moment self-conscious. She was used to flirtations on and off the stage, and she had silently classified these young men with the sons of rich families, born to tease and flirt with young girls. She grimaced and talked swiftly and loudly, seemingly without inhibitions because she felt Lang was not of her class. She was merely tolerant of the mild flirtations which she expected.

"I had not dreamed that Si-an could be so beautiful in spring. The war is a good thing in a way. Otherwise, I would be still in Mukden or Peking or Nanking," she chirped in her rich resonant voice which lent a musical, feminine quality to whatever she said.

"Then I wouldn't have met you," said Lang.

"Then you would be admiring some other girl," she replied artfully.

There was pain in Lang's eyes. "Are you not just a little happy to have met us?"

O-yun smiled at him sweetly.

Fan, propping himself against the trunk of a tree, said: "Come, sing a song for us, O-yun. Sing a love ditty."

O-yun glanced at the young men. She knew many popular

songs such as sing-song girls sang—sensuous, sentimental, and often bawdy.

“No,” she said. “I will sing something else for you.”

She began to sing a melody taken from ancient songs, for which many poets had written the words. Old Tsui took up a stick to beat time on a rock. The ditty, called *shingsiangtse*, was a short melody, with three abrupt cadenced lines of three syllables each at the end. Her voice was soft and low, and she hummed the accompaniment between the lines.

When a friend comes who is well-loved and admired,
As by some idle common nothing inspired,
Ask him to stay awhile for friendship's sake:
 Drink when happy
 —Sing when drunk
 —Sleep when tired!

A short, low wall, and windows hid by trees,
A tiny grassy pond myself to please;
And there upon its shady, rugged banks:
 A cool breath
 —A little moon
 —A little breeze!

No marble halls, no painted gates or tower
Can quite compare with my secluded bower.
The grass beneath my feet enchants the eye:
 Or in rain
 —Or in shine
 —Or in shower.

And how about an idle life leading?
From balcony watch the fish in water feeding,
And earn from flowing time a leisure life:
 Light an incense
 —Have a cha'
 —And some reading.

For household use, some furniture decrepit;
'Tis enough: the hills around are so exquisite
When guests arrive, to kill the idle hours:

Fill the kettle
—Brew the tea
—And sip it!

O sweep the yard, but spare the mossy spots!
Let petals bedeck thy steps with purple dots
As in a painting. What's more wonderful,
Some pine trees
—And bamboos
—And apricots!

Let bloom in order peach and pear and cherry!
Each in its turn and none is in a hurry.
Who knows but when and what our fortune is?
So be wise
—Be content
—Be merry!

Fan's eyes narrowed as he listened to the girl's song. It could not be said whether he agreed with the sentiment expressed in the poem, but he fell in with the poetic mood. He closed his eyes, humming the melody with her, and when she finished, he was enthusiastic.

But Lang was quiet. He had not expected O-yun to know verses written by real poets. The girl's voice carolling like a lark's in the open country, and the shadows of the leaves falling on her face, cast a spell over him and created an illusion that was almost too perfect to be real. Leaning with one arm on the grass, he gazed at her moving lips and her silken hair and could hardly believe it. In the background was an old fisherman, still as a statue, watching for fish, and tall horses were prancing and frisking in the fields. O-yun's young body, sitting on the grass, was more harmonious, more beautiful against this background than it was on the stage.

"Sing that first verse for me again," he said, and when she obliged, he intoned the words after her.

"The trouble with men," he said, "is that they don't drink

when happy, don't sing when they are drunk, if they are drunk at all, and can't sleep when they are tired. What a memory you have for words!"

"From childhood," said the father, "O-yun remembers lines she heard only once."

Lang said to the girl: "Have you heard Su Tungpo's song for this melody?"

"No."

"I'll write it down for you, then, his *shingsiangtse*."

"There is no need to write it. You speak it. Just try," said the father proudly.

Lang recited Su's verse slowly and clearly.

"Have you got it?" he asked keenly.

"I think so. But don't laugh at me if I forget. Recite it once more to make sure."

Lang repeated the song while O-yun's lips moved, following his words silently.

"I have it," she said. She began to sing.

O the clear moon's speckless, silvery night!
When filling thy cup, be sure to fill it quite!
Strive not for frothy fame or bubble wealth:
A passing dream
—A flashing spark
—A shadow's flight!

She paused a little and went on:

O what is knowledge, fine and superfine?
To innocent and simple joys resign!
When I go home, I'll carry on my back:
A load of clouds
—A bag of songs
—A pot of wine.

"Extraordinary!" cried Lang.

Old Tsui was proud of his daughter. "It is a pity she is born in our profession, and has never gone to school. She has only one fault, and that is her stubbornness."

O-yun was not one of those meek and sweet girls brought up with the manners of a *shiaochieh*.

"How can you say that, Father? I am never stubborn."

"You listen to her. She is quick with her tongue."

O-yun lolled her tongue out and said: "I depend on this tongue for a living, don't I?" She laughed.

The father looked at Lang and said: "A year ago in Peking there was a young man of the Tsai family who wanted to marry her, and she just wouldn't."

"Oh, Father, don't bring up that fool again."

The father went on. "He came to hear her every night. He admired her a great deal. She just wouldn't marry him."

"Of course I wouldn't."

Fan asked: "Why wouldn't you?"

"I don't like dandies, the *kungtseko-cr*. After all, this is a lifetime affair for me."

"She just would not become a merchant's wife," her father said.

"You can't blame her, Mr. Tsui," said Lang.

"I am thinking only as her father. When daughters grow up, what parents are not thinking of their marriage? Even for myself, I want to have someone to depend upon for my old age. She would not marry one of our own profession and she would not marry rich men's sons. You two gentlemen have been so kind, otherwise I would not have spoken of it." The old man's eyes rested on Lang.

"Father, we were having a nice time and you start to worry about my future. I am still young. When I reach middle age and am still an old maid, I will become a merchant's wife, don't worry."

She got up from the ground and walked towards the bank.

"Don't be tragic," said Fan.

"Come back. We are just talking," said the father.

She turned back, her slim figure silhouetted against the bank.

"You stop talking about my marriage and I will."

Then she came back slowly, smiling. There was a soft glow on her cheeks. At that moment she looked almost a child.

A WEEK AGO A YOUNG MANCHURIAN GENERAL HAD ARRIVED TO visit the city. He was at the head of an army driven out of Manchuria by the Japanese, dispersed and broken, it was true, but loyal to their Manchurian home and therefore to his leadership.

The governor of Si-an had only thirty thousand troops under his command and had hoped to make the Manchurian general his ally; he had therefore welcomed the retreating Manchurian troops to his territory. At the railway station the young general had been received with more than the usual pomp, with three bands blaring their tumultuous and cacophonous welcome. Some twenty officials had lined up on the platform to receive him. The fact that during the retreat from Mukden the general's wife had used several army lorries to cart away her jewels and furs was properly published and recorded as a matter of history. But the general of a big army was still a force to be reckoned with, and for all practical purposes he had entered Si-an with as much acclaim as if he had returned from a campaign of incredible, smashing victories.

The governor himself had personally gone to the station to welcome the distinguished visitor and had driven him to his own garden home. His home included several acres of land in a rustic, isolated quarter of the north city, and was used principally to house distinguished guests. Governor Yang had planned to live in it himself, but his office was in the Manchu quarter and there he often had dinners and stayed late at night. His wife, a forceful and very shrewd woman, had decided that this was a plan on the part of her husband to escape her vigilance and preferred to stay where she was, behind the office, and control her husband's activities from a close distance. It is hard to believe that the tall, husky governor, a soldier and a general who could shoot people without much scruple, should tremble before a woman. Yet it was well-known that his wife had scolded him in public before his staff and that he dared not do a thing against her wish.

Governor Yang wanted to do everything possible to make

the Manchurian guest welcome. He had placed at his disposal his own cook, and every morning he went to the garden home himself to pay his respects. Once the visiting general had said casually that he had never tasted a curious dish eaten by the fabulous Queen Yang Kweifei of the Tang Dynasty, at whose bath he had been staying. The next evening he saw a big bowl of stewed camel's hump served at the dinner-table. The Manchurian guest tasted it and said: "It is delicious. It tastes like Manchurian bear's paw, not as greasy, but it has a slight gamey flavour. Where did you get the camel's hump?"

"Isn't it easy to kill a camel?" replied Governor Yang. "You can have it every day if you wish."

The young general was touched by this demonstration of friendship. His propensity for dancing and especially for ladies' company was well-known. Governor Yang did not overlook this point. Moreover, the governor himself had now an iron-clad excuse for a little relaxation from his wife's strictest vigilance. There were officials' wives who regarded it as an honour to sit at the same table with the famous Manchurian guest. Surrounded by pretty ladies picked from the officials' wives by the governor's secretariat, and between juicy morsels of camel's hump, the young general drank copious toasts and swore 'Recovery of Manchuria!'

Personally the Manchurian general was a charming young man. He was well educated and had modern ideas, loved riding and sports, and was a good dancer. He was impulsive, but he was able, suave, and quick to learn. That he had been free with his officers' wives while he was in Manchuria was well-known. Many officers' wives were quite charmed by the young autocrat and were quite willing. Many a husband's promotion had been promised on the dancing-floor or at the mahjongg-table or, as the wicked tongues whispered, in bed. The young general lavished gifts with one hand and took sacrifices with the other. If he liked an actress or a lady of society, it was only necessary to invite her to his home as a house guest for a few days. Some came out and said they had only played mahjongg, some boasted of their good time, and some preferred to say nothing of it at all.

Governor Yang was now having a good time. He seldom had had such a good time with ladies. He really had a simple

peasant mind and relied very much on his wife's judgment for important decisions. He loved battle, horses, wine, and women. Of these four, three had been taken away from him. His wife checked his drinking and discountenanced her husband's proximity to young women, she herself being well on the road to the half-century mark. And there was no battle in the region where he was. Quietly he had submitted to the indignity, ordered by his wife, that when he was having a haircut in his own room four guards were posted at the four corners with bared bayonets pointed at the barber and, therefore, at himself.

"Do you mean I can't defend myself against a barber?"

"Not in that position with your neck outstretched. I take no risks," his wife had replied.

He sighed and thought of the years when he was a young captain roving the provinces, fighting hot battles and washing his wounds in a river. It seemed so long ago. "And now I have to take a shave under guard with four bayonets pointed at me!"

His wife had approved of the recent gaieties because of weighty reasons which had to do with her husband's power. If her husband could become a sworn brother of the Manchurian commander, he might be able to assimilate some of his troops and increase his own strength. Mrs. Yang therefore tolerated, even encouraged, the presence of young ladies at his garden home. Governor Yang felt as if he had been let out of prison, on parole of good conduct, it is true, but free, free as a man wanted to be free before he had married and before he became governor.

The governor thought about what he should do next to keep his guest entertained.

"There is a beautiful girl story-teller in the city. Would you like to hear her?"

"If she is good," replied the Manchurian guest.

"She is young and very pretty. All Si-an is raving about her."

"How do you know she is pretty?" asked Mrs. Yang.

"So they say," said her husband, looking about for support.

"Yes, she is wonderful," said the adjutant's wife, who was a familiar friend of the general, her husband being in the Manchurian Army.

"Then we must go and hear her. Where does she appear?"

"At the Tisanlou. But there is no need to go. We will call her here."

"I am willing to go," said the young commander. "Walk a mile for a camel, they say in America. I will walk a mile for a young and pretty slut."

"There is really no need, General."

"Then take one of my cards and invite her here as my house guest. She is just a story-teller entertaining in a tea-house. I will send some soldiers to fetch her."

The adjutant's wife smiled. "General, I think you are going to have a new bill of fare," she said with an artful giggle.

"Don't talk nonsense," said the young general affably.

The governor called his aide and whispered a few words, concluding with a loud martial voice: "Go, and don't keep us waiting! Your ——!" The oath stopped in his mouth, not because he wanted to show good society manners before his wife and guests, but because it is a human habit to abbreviate the words we use often. But the oath held back was no less effective than an oath exploded; the significant holding of breath in place of the aide's 'mother' had the effect of a military command.

We have already had occasion to note the governor's propensity for swearing by people's mothers. Once a visiting general was visiting his army and he gave a parade in his honour. The visiting general was invited to give his commands. But he was a Cantonese and gave the commands in his hybrid Cantonese Mandarin and the soldiers failed to understand him. He ordered 'Forward march', but he said tsau instead of tsou, and it sounded like 'Good morning'. The soldiers thought he was beginning a lecture of advice on patriotism, and did not move. Governor Yang was furious.

He stepped forward.

"Forward march! Your mothers!"

The last oath turned the trick and, lo and behold, the battalion was on the move. The governor turned with a smile to his visitor, and began to engage him in conversation.

"Just a demonstration of how good my men are."

"Wonderful!" said the visiting Cantonese.

But the battalion was like a machine. Once the men's feet were moving, it was like a crawling mechanical toy which could

be stopped only by an obstacle. The governor had only shown his guest how to start the mechanical toy. The soldiers were coming straight like an irresistible Roman phalanx towards an enemy, and were within twenty feet of where the governor and his guests were talking.

"Wonderful! Such precision!" the Cantonese was commenting.

"Well, are you not going to stop them?"

"No, I thought——"

"Just halt them!"

"What did you say?"

The battalion was five feet away, advancing like a tidal wave. The governor's face turned red. Before he knew it, the invincible battalion had swept over him like a wave and engulfed him and his friend. Two cadets had knocked against him, but, soldiers that they were, they moved on and closed ranks.

The governor's face turned red. He turned round and saw the battalion moving away from him towards a stream some twenty yards away.

"Let them have it!" he cursed.

One of the sergeants first reached the stream and without further command was already going knee-deep into the water, but the cadets hesitated and marked time on the bank.

The governor clutched his hair with both hands and shouted his orders.

"Battalion halt! About turn! You sons of monkeys! I told you to march. Did I tell you to go and have a drink of water?"

* * * * *

O-yun was just completing her performance when the governor's soldiers came in. When she had finished, she went backstage and was confronted with three soldiers.

"Come with me," said the captain.

Old Tsui came in, terrified.

"You can't arrest her. She has done no wrong."

"Don't be frightened," said the captain. "I have orders to take her to the governor's house."

"What for?" she cried.

"It can't be bad when the governor invites you to his home—not to the jail." He turned to Old Tsui. "Who are you?"

"I am her father, and I play the sanshuan for her. Can I come along?"

"No, we have orders to take your daughter only. Come, hurry."

"You needn't be so rough," said O-yun. "If the governor invites me to sing at his home, he might let me know in advance. How do I know who you are?"

The captain, impatient, pointed to his badge, a square piece of cloth with a red border on which were written the words 'Gendarmerie of the Provincial Government of Shensi.'

"The car is waiting."

O-yun walked out, followed by her father and the soldiers. The audience stared in surprise. Fan happened to be away, and his men stood watching. Several of them followed to the entrance to see what was happening.

The small black car bore the licence of the municipal government. The father started to get in, but the captain said firmly: "I am sorry. I have no orders to take you."

Old Tsui handed the small hand drum and the drumstick to his daughter, and peering into the car spoke softly to her: "Come back as soon as you can. I shall be waiting."

"We will send your daughter home. Don't worry."

The car immediately started, its red tail-lights disappearing in the distance.

"Is she under arrest?" asked one of the brothers.

Old Tsui looked at him. The man said in a friendly way: "Grand-uncle Fan is not here tonight." He made a secret sign with his thumb, but Old Tsui did not understand it.

"Are you a friend of Fan laoyeh?"

"Yes. It looks as if Miss O-yun is invited to entertain the governor and his Manchurian guest. It is a government car."

Old Tsui shook his head. "This is unheard of, to snatch a girl away as if she were a thief! They wouldn't do a thing like that in Peking."

"You go back. We'll let Grand-uncle Fan know."

Old Tsui turned his weak legs towards the entrance and went up to his room. In spite of what the captain and the brother had said, he felt uneasy. He lit his pipe and tried to think the

best of the situation. He always expected to have a snack after the performance, and went to the small restaurant where they always ate. The waiter saw that O-yun was not with him and asked for her, and he answered abstractedly: "She is invited out." But he felt uncomfortable, and after the light meal went back to his room.

He was old in the profession and knew what girls of that class often had to put up with. Because of O-yun's independent temper, he had guarded her carefully and had hoped that one day she would be married off into a good home. Lots of actresses had been invited to homes, or had been kept or taken as mistresses in some rich family. O-yun was different, and she had a will of her own. Only two days before, when he had mentioned marriage, he had really had in mind the way Lang had looked at her. But the possibility was remote; Lang was a cultured scholar, and had been abroad and was independent, and Old Tsui had not dared to hope. So his mouth had opened and shut again and he had contented himself with barely mentioning the question of O-yun's marriage as a general matter. O-yun had told enough stories of romance; but she had never felt attracted towards any man.

The Manchurian war-lord's ways with actresses and society ladies were well known when they were living in Mukden. It worried Old Tsui to think what the Manchurian might do, and what O-yun might do. He lit his pipe and smoked, watching the clock on the wall ticking, the little brass disc of the pendulum swaying ceaselessly right and left, the hand jerking to indicate the passing of another minute. By the time it was one o'clock and his daughter had not returned, the jerking of the clock's hand seemed to be mocking him. It was too late to go and disturb Fan.

In that state of worry and apprehension, he dozed off.

The next morning he was waked up by someone banging at his door. Old Tsui always slept with the shutters closed and in the dark he could not tell what time it was.

A voice called through the door. "Uncle Tsui, is O-yun back?" He recognised Fan's voice.

The question suddenly made him remember the last night. O-yun had not returned. He went and pushed open the shutters while he asked: "Is that you, Fan laoyeh?"

He opened the door and saw Fan's grave face.

"So O-yun did not return last night! Flying Whip came and told me that O-yun had been taken in a car by soldiers."

Old Tsui was throwing on his gown. He told what had happened, which added nothing to what Fan already knew. He looked more perplexed and troubled now that he realised that his daughter had been kept in the governor's house all night.

"This is outrageous! What do they think my daughter is? A prostitute?" His lips spluttered in anger. "And what will people say? And how is O-yun going to face her audience?"

"I did not think they would send her home, when Flying Whip told me where she was taken."

"Isn't there a law against the abduction of girls?"

"You know better than that! Since the general of the North-Eastern Provinces lost his empire, the girls of the North-West have to pay for it," said Fan sarcastically. "The Japanese rape Manchuria, so the Manchurian war-lord rapes Chinese girls in revenge. This is a dog-eat-dog world."

Fan's eyes shifted right and left, and when he spoke his voice was cool.

"May I ask you a very personal question, about O-yun?"

"Certainly. She is your adopted daughter."

"Is she a good girl—I mean has she ever had a man?"

"Fan laoyeh, you have helped us so much. I am telling you the truth. Other girls of her age may have had men with them. Not my daughter. She has not been to school and has not read many books. But even in our profession a girl values her chastity as much as any other girl. We sell skill; we don't sell flesh. We are humble people, but we are old-fashioned."

"It sounds worse and worse," Fan remarked.

"What do you mean?"

"I came to ask you if O-yun is a virgin and where she stands about those things. If she were a loose girl, she would probably not mind. She would just come back today or tomorrow and not feel the worse for it."

Fan's face was taut, his eyes directed at the father. "Uncle Tsui, you have heard of the young general of Manchuria?"

The father lowered his eyes and said: "Who hasn't? We were in Mukden."

"You told me O-yun is stubborn."

"Yes. Even if nothing happens, and she returns safely, this thing will get talked about. There will be such gossip that we'll die of shame."

"Don't talk of shame now. Perhaps it is not so bad. Come, you eat something downstairs and go to the governor's house as the girl's father and try to find out some news."

The tea-house downstairs was already open. A few tables were occupied by people who came in the morning to have tea and steamed buns for their breakfast and hot towels.

Old Tsui took a rickshaw for the governor's home and returned to Fan's house about ten o'clock. Lang was there.

"What did you find out?"

"Nothing. The guards would not let me in. I told them who I was and said my daughter had not returned. 'She is the governor's guest. What are you worried about?' the guard said. I didn't like his wicked smile. I wanted to ask some more questions, but the guard said: 'I would advise you to go away. Is this the kind of place for you to hang about?' I could not even send a word in to her."

"Was the guard a Manchurian?"

"I don't know. I think so. He was tall, like the Manchurian soldiers we see."

That afternoon the news became worse. Towards one o'clock a soldier came to the tea-house and instructed the manager to post a sign that the story-teller O-yun was ill and her programme would be suspended for a few days. Old Tsui came to tell Fan the news, stamping his feet.

"Fan laoyeh, I am worried. I don't know what O-yun may do, shut up there and no one can reach her. Isn't there a law any more? Kidnapping a girl like that!"

Fan compressed his lips and looked at the father. "Your sighs don't help. At least she is still safe."

"You don't know this daughter of mine. She might do anything to protect her honour."

Lang, sitting listening, suddenly threw back his chair and stood up. "Old Fan, we must do something. We can't sit by and see a good girl despoiled by a roué."

"Don't get excited," said Fan. Then he addressed the father. "The problem is fairly simple, but you have to make your choice. O-yun is my adopted daughter and I have promised you that

she will be safe in Si-an. Old Fan never fails his promise. I must get her out, and I can."

"You can?" The old man's eyes brimmed with tears.

"If I don't get her out, my surname will not be Fan. Don't worry, old uncle. You will have to make your choice. They will not kill her. If she resists, they may keep her for a few days until she yields. Or the beast may force himself upon her and then let her out. He will not keep her permanently. Then you will keep quiet and say nothing. People will talk, of course, but in a little time it will be all forgotten. That is one way, the safer and peaceful way. But if you want me to get her out now, I can, but I must warn you that you and your daughter will have to leave the city immediately."

"I will do anything if you can get her out now."

Fan stood up and laid his hand on the father's shoulder. "Go home and say nothing. A tea-house is a public place and you must pretend that nothing has happened. Pay your bills, pack up a few things, but don't say that you are leaving. Come and meet your daughter here after midnight, and both of you must leave the city at once, tomorrow."

* * * * *

Half an hour later Li Fei dropped in to see his friends, unaware of all that had happened, as he had only just come back from his trip. He saw Fan sitting with his legs stretched out on a chair, his hands behind his head, puffing and blowing. Lang was sitting in another chair with evident agitation on his face.

Fan's face was usually a pale brown, but a tinge of colour showed beneath his skin, especially at the pock-marks. Li Fei had seen him angry before, when he had looked like that. At such times his bristling black hair added to the impression of a man aroused in anger, and he moved his eyes only sideways. Then he would speak in a low deliberate voice, which was all the more frightening.

"Sit down," said Fan briefly.

Li Fei took a chair, pulling out a cigarette without lighting it, and glanced from Fan to Lang. "But why the dark despair?"

"O-yun has been kidnapped," Fan said. His voice was coldly casual.

"Kidnapped? By whom?"

"By that young, bald-headed Manchurian scoundrel. He has run away from the Japs and now he is conquering girls in sweet revenge. I have to get O-yun out. It is rather sad. O-yun and her father have to leave town tomorrow."

Fan added: "That Manchurian just wants to rape a young girl. Old Fan can't allow a thing like that to happen. We people of the North-West will not allow a North-Eastern rake to rape our girls. This is my business."

Li Fei said: "There is a ball tonight at the China Travel Hotel in honour of the Manchurian general."

Fan sat up quickly. "Is this true? How do you know?"

"I am invited as a newspaper-man."

"We will go. Can you get us tickets?"

"But you said you have to get O-yun out tonight."

Fan rose. "I want to get a glimpse of the young general." He scratched his head while he laughed to himself.

Li Fei said: "I was not thinking of going to the ball. I hate that kind of thing. There will be speeches, I am sure. Are you sure you want to go?"

"You get us the tickets and we'll go together," said Fan, as he paced the floor.

"I am not going," said Lang, "and I don't understand your going if O-yun is coming back."

"Don't worry. She'll be back. Luck is with us!"

"I would rather stay and wait for her."

"She won't be back till midnight."

Lang's face was melancholy and flushed. In spite of his brusque exterior, Fan felt a tenderness for his friend. He lit a cigarette. "I don't understand you. O-yun is a nice girl, I admit, but you have been to Paris and have seen pretty faces before. Now you are giving me cause for worry. Curious thing. All my friends are in love except myself."

9

SELDOM WAS THERE SUCH A BRILLIANT GATHERING IN SI-AN, AND for that matter seldom was there a ball in the city. All the important officials and their wives were invited, whether they

could dance or not. An assortment of cars were parked outside and policemen in black uniform barricaded the streets, allowing only those with tickets to pass. The hall, which held a maximum of two hundred, was jammed. On the platform, where an orchestra boasting four violins was playing, stood the inevitable lectern, over which hung a big banner with the words 'Welcome General S——! Recover the North-East.' Li Fei was worried when he saw the lectern. Somebody was going to get up there and give the people advice on patriotism.

There was considerable excitement and hubbub on the floor. The governor and his old-fashioned wife were there, so were Garrison Commander Tai and his wife and the lesser luminaries of Si-an society. The gentlemen were in their civilian attire, in jackets and long gowns. Governor Yang towered above the rest, his weather-beaten peasant face looking ill-consorted with his silk long gown. The Manchurian guest, however, like some of the younger men, was in a dinner-jacket; a short figure with a full, round face of light brown complexion, and a head covered with hair thinning on the top. He was distinguished only by the beautiful ladies who surrounded him. He stood very erect and smiled to anybody. A knot of people always formed to listen to every word he said. The younger men were conspicuous by their navy-blue Chungshan uniforms. A few foreign missionaries were also there with their plain wives, who disapproved of dancing on principle, but wanted to see the Manchurian general in person.

The ladies appeared in long, graceful silk gowns. A number of them were old-fashioned women in their middle age who had been invited and who had come for the rare pleasure of seeing the distinguished general. The most important officials also brought their young children. The older women had their hair brushed back, smooth as lacquer and gathered into a bun at the back, but the young women flaunted their permanent waves. Except for a few with artfully set coiffures, they wore their hair long and shaggy, spread over their necks, as was the fashion in Si-an, which was always two years behind Shanghai.

All the modern wives who could dance had been invited. These younger women, better dressed but less important, were invited because there was a scarcity of women who could dance.

Among these was an exquisite creature, reported to be of sing-song origin, who accompanied the chief of the department of finance. She easily outshone the others with her bright eyes and her vivacious and artful, cultivated laughter. She might be called a concubine, since the chief of finance had an old wife who lived in the country in Hunan. At least, for the years of his service in Si-an, he was a monogamist, and she appeared in public addressed as *fujen* or Madame Ting, which conveniently ignored the line between wife and concubine.

Li Fei saw that the whole Tu family was there except the wife. Mayor Tu had not wanted Chunmei to come, and his wife had thought it would be a usurpation of her own status. But this was a rare social occasion, and Chunmei had insisted on it to the point of a trial of strength.

There had been a storm at the house before they came. Tu was in a delicate dilemma.

"How would I introduce you?" he said.

Appearing at Si-an's most brilliant social occasion tonight meant everything to Chunmei. She broke into tears, which meant that she was going to have her way. Throwing herself upon the bed, she delivered herself of the following discourse, which greatly surprised the master. It seemed to break out from her innermost thoughts, long suppressed, but now gushing like water over a dam.

"I have lived with you for eleven years and have borne you two children. I have lived this long and have never yet seen a family like ours! You must think of me. What am I? Neither a maid nor a concubine! I never dare disobey your wife and I pay her the respect that is due. Other women can appear in public. Only *I* cannot. I am a human being and not a ghost! Don't think I'll disgrace you in public. Even a dog can appear in public and follow his master! Am I less than a dog? If I have been a good mother to your children, my children must know who their mother is. If I have not done my duty and you are ashamed of me and disgusted with me, you can send me out of this house tomorrow, and I will pack up and take my children with me!"

The torrent of words was matched by a torrent of tears.

Tu said: "I have not said anything. I am perfectly satisfied with you. But this ball is a formal occasion. I cannot take you

there and introduce you as my concubine, and you very well know the reason."

"Am I the mother of your children or not? A human being living in this world must have some face after all. When I die, my children will not even know how to word the inscription on my tombstone! If you will not think of me, you must think of your grandchildren!" She spoke the last word in a tone of sharp innuendo.

Mr. Tu was now both embarrassed and worried. The wife had heard all this from her room and now came in.

"This is rebellion," said the wife. "A yatou is always a yatou, yatou temper and yatou mind." She cursed. "She would choose such a night to make a row!" Her hair had just been done up by a woman coiffeuse. She came towards Chunmei, ready to settle the account with her by some form of feminine pugilistics.

Mr. Tu pushed his wife towards the door and said: "Let me talk with her. You go out."

But his wife stood at the door watching the form of another woman crying in bed. Her face turned green with anger.

Mr. Tu sat on the bedside and said with great evident patience: "Chunmei, you must be reasonable. You must think of me and of the whole family. It is not that I don't want to take you, but I cannot. I would not know what to say when people ask me who you are."

"That is simple," said Chunmei. "If you don't know, I can go tonight and ask the governor himself to decide for you. I will tell him! If the governor says I have no right to live in your house, I will even accept that."

"Don't be childish. They would not let you in," he said.

"Oh, wouldn't they! I should like to know who is going to stop the mother of Mayor Tu's grandchildren from going in."

"You are not threatening me with creating a scene in the street on this night of all nights?" Tu Fanglin was getting angry.

"I am not threatening. I will take the two children by the hand and go in as their mother."

Tu Fanglin was really frightened now. He could deal with crooked politicians, but he could not deal with a crying, desperate, and determined woman. His tone softened.

"If you can tell me what I should do, I will do it gladly."

"You men with all your books have no better ideas than an uneducated woman!"

"Have you an idea?"

"Am I the mother of your grandchildren or not?"

"Of course you are."

"Then what should the mother of a person's grandchildren be called?"

"*Shifu* (daughter-in-law) of course," Tu answered without thinking. Then he caught her meaning. The sudden revelation threw his face into alarm. "What a clever and daring woman!" he thought to himself.

"Isn't it simple? And on my tombstone my surname will be Tu," she said firmly.

It took some time for the full force of the idea to sink into his head. Such a status would be respectable, permissible, and would not change anything, including the terms of address. Yet he had a feeling that he was being wheedled into something he would rather not do.

"Why, of course, my darling *shifu*! Of course. You will be my son's widow! I never thought of that! You come along. I will present you as my *shifu*."

He slapped her thigh and performed little manipulations with his hand. His wife stood at the door more dumbfounded than enraged. If at this moment a photographer could have taken a snapshot of Mayor Tu at home, it would have been as fascinating and revealing as the picture of *The Choice of Paris* in their parlour.

"My legs don't need any massage," said Chunmei, sitting up and pushing him away.

The embarrassing question of respectability settled, and with Chunmei pacified by having her way, Tu crossed to his wife's room, to find that she had let down her elaborate coiffure and was sitting up in bed. To make the story short, the wife briefly announced that the scene had brought on a splitting headache and that she was not going to the ball.

Under the circumstances, Tu could do either of two things. He could persuade his wife that the right thing to do was to accept the situation and go. This did not work. Then for a moment he thought that, as matters were, they had better all

stay at home. But then he thought of the importance of the occasion. Mortified to be called by his wife a *laopushiu*, 'old unregenerate', he went back to Chunmei.

Now that she had won the crucial battle, she had got up and was dressing for the party. At the sight of the beautiful young woman, the mortification he had suffered from his wife's taunts was all gone. He approached Chunmei with a smile and whispered to her: "My heart and liver, your popo is not going."

"I heard it," said Chunmei, and went on making up her face.

Chunmei knew that she had cheek-bones that might be called prominent, but the corners of her eyes were perfectly smooth, and she knew how to take advantage of this by a proper covering of rouge and by making her cheeks glow just under her eyes. On her forehead she brushed up a few fringes to set them off. Below, she painted thin arched eyebrows bending like a new moon. Youth, aided by woman's art, gave her a radiance. Tu Fanglin looked at her and was happy. All ideas of cancelling their attendance had evaporated.

Chunmei picked a pink dress hemmed in black, in order to show her youth better. As she surveyed herself in the mirror she knew that she was the equal to any woman, and she was not afraid.

When Tsujen came with his car, he was really frightened to see Chunmei dressed up ready to go with them, and Sianghua looked thunderstruck. The father explained, trying almost to make a joke of it.

"I should have thought of this long ago. After all, Chunmei has as much right to appear in public as anybody else. I am glad that her position is now regularised."

Sianghua found that she had gained a sister-in-law. In her heart she admired the cunning wiles of Chunmei.

If anybody had thought that because Chunmei had never appeared in formal society she therefore would be lost, he would have been surprised. She was grace and poise itself. As she and Sianghua moved about, Sianghua introduced her properly as her sister-in-law. Tu Fanglin left the women alone as soon as he entered the hall.

Tsujen was happy tonight. Among the guests were many people from Nanking. His father introduced him to the Manchurian general and the governor referred to him as a very

promising young man. He had his ideas of creating a network of motor roads, not without his cement in mind, and he was hoping he might be made a member of the committee for development of the 'Western Capital'.

There was social glitter in the room. Tsujen looked at his wife proudly. There was a 'living buddha' from Choni lamasery near Sunganor, whom he knew and with whom he had had business dealings. Then somebody tapped him on the shoulder and said: "Hullo, Parker." He turned and saw that it was an American missionary whom he had met at the Rotary Club. They talked in English; those who could really talk English usually sought out each other. For the most part they believed in the same things, had the same modern point of view. Certainly the missionaries agreed on the need of good roads and cement for China, particularly for the North-West. They talked about the extension of the railway which had been on paper for decades. The missionary, Bradshaw, was interested in seeing the living buddha, and when Tsujen said he knew him, asked to be introduced.

The living buddha (one of about five hundred, big and small) was a Tibetan with a shorn head, conspicuous in his mitred cap, his purple robe and his high, soft leather boots. Bradshaw could talk enough Chinese. On learning that the American was a missionary, the living buddha smiled kindly and proudly. Bradshaw asked many questions and complained, in a joking way, that he had never been able to make a Tibetan convert.

"Come and try," said the living buddha with a smile. "Others have tried for fifty years. I invite you, and if you can make a convert of one of our men, you will be the first one to do so."

Bradshaw confessed to Tsujen that the missions could convert the Chinese, but could make no headway among the Mohammedans or the Tibetan buddhists.

"That is why I like the Chinese," said Bradshaw.

"The Chinese do not take their religion seriously," said Tsujen. "The Tibetans and the Mohammedans do. You had better not accept the living buddha's invitation. He is fooling you."

The orchestra struck up the national anthem and all stood and faced the platform. On the platform were Governor Yang and the Manchurian general. After the anthem they turned

and bowed to the portrait of Sun Yat-sen, and the audience followed. For the most part the audience were left standing, because there were no chairs except those lined up against the walls.

Li Fei was shy in public. While Jo-an was surrounded by her family, he had not gone up to speak to her. Fan seemed to know everybody. In particular, he was carrying on a conversation with Commander Tai of the police force.

The inevitable speeches were to begin. The governor was to make a speech of introduction and of welcome to the Manchurian guest. Li Fei hoped it would be brief. He did not want any more advice about loving your country, loving your parents, and on the people being 'masters of the Republic'. Speeches by public men seldom went above the level of the elementary schools, for public men could not think of anything else to say except to advise what the people should do.

Tonight, however, Governor Yang was different. He was anxious to review the record of his rule for the benefit of all Si-an and of the Manchurian visitor. He liked to dabble in modern words like *progress* and *democracy*, and had even attempted more modern terms like *stage of revolution* and *the masses*, which the leftist writers had made popular. One of his favourite words was *psychology*. For the most part he managed to use the words without mishap. Tonight, however, he would outdo himself. He went into the mileage of roads that had been built and emancipation of Si-an women, the ban on opium, the disappearance of concubines, and, in general, the wholesome moral atmosphere of his province. Coming to education, he said: "Ten years ago, only fifteen per cent of the people of this province could read. Now it is fifteen per thousand!" He brought his big fist down on the table dramatically.

He emphasised the word heavily, because it was one of the modern terms he had acquired recently, and because the word *thousand* sounded bigger and better than *hundred*.

Some people in the audience saw the error and were amused, but the great majority, like that of any audience, either was not listening or got the impression that education in the province was progressing by leaps and bounds. From the governor's spirit of enthusiasm they got what he meant. His oratory swept them

along. Li Fei saw a few people standing near-by, whispering with good-humoured smiles.

"Are you going to put that 'fifteen per thousand' stuff in your report?" he asked one of his fellow newspaper-men.

The man laughed. "Do I want to get shot?"

"At this rate of progress, in another ten years only fifteen per ten thousand will be able to read newspapers, and we shall all starve."

The joke was picked up slowly and spread over the city after a few days, but of course no newspaper ever published it.

The young commander was more dull, more conventional, but also more brief. His voice did not carry so well. He was glad of the honour being done him tonight, thanked the governor and everybody, and soared at once into the moralistic plane. He knew Chinese history well enough and quoted a few references on noble endurance in times of national trouble. He took the wording of the banner 'Recover the North-East' for his subject, and enlarged on it.

"The harder the times, the greater our determination. As long as our people have not lost the great old virtues of moral stamina, endurance, willingness to go through hardships, willingness for sacrifice, and the determination to struggle and fight and endure, the final victory will be ours! I give you my pledge that no stones will be left unturned, no mountains of obstacles will not be overcome, and there are no personal hardships I will not endure, until Manchuria belongs to China again!"

There was a great clapping of hands, the band struck up again, and the two speakers came down from the platform.

When the dance began, the older ladies retired to the chairs along the wall and prepared to watch the dancing, which some of them had never seen. The governor's wife, of course, could not dance. The secretary to the Manchurian general had carefully picked a few modern ladies. He guided him to Madame Ting, wife of the finance department chief, who was in a gorgeous dress of cut velvet, black on beige background. The general, even though slightly bald, had a small moustache. He was easily the best dancer in the party. He stepped quickly and twirled, and Madame Ting followed him gracefully and expertly. There were a lot of men and ladies on the floor now, some of the men in dinner-jackets and some in long silk gowns.

That clothes make the man is true most of the time, but not always. Governor Yang was in his long silk robe. He had only lately learned to dance at home parties and he had a beginner's enthusiasm and a great desire to be modern. Dancing, he had discovered, was easy; it consisted of moving one's legs right and left in succession. He said it was like a promenade after dinner, good for the digestion, with the additional pleasure of holding a beautiful lady close in front of you. Nor was he a dull dancer; he entered into this new indoor sport with the spirit of outdoor sport. Martial, he moved around trailing his enormous feet in black boots, forward and backward, always in a straight line. He would charge into another dancing couple like an advancing army, but they knew that he was the governor. Very soon the other dancers learned his dancing tactics and watched the direction he was going and opened a long swath before his advance. The effect was that he moved like a mowing machine, clearing a space wherever he went. His broad, long sleeves encompassed his partner and his body weight gave him considerable momentum. Taller than the rest of the company by a head, he could easily be seen and avoided, particularly because of the remarkable shape of his head, closely cropped in the army fashion and revealing the narrow upward sloping contour. As he had a black moustache and beard and a broad fleshy chin and face, the result was that of a clearly marked inverted oval. His ears were swept backwards and his enormous nose was flattened, as if nature had intended that nothing should protrude and spoil that oval contour. In spite of that, it was a warm, likeable face. His blubber lips, his full and fleshy cheeks, his very broad flat nose, all spoke of a man warm and emotional, while his eyes had a gentle droop from which he peeped happily with a sparkle at the world which lay at his feet.

The Tu family was sitting far back at the farther end of the hall. Li Fei went over and found Jo-an happily watching. Her face flushed when she saw him.

She introduced him to the young attractive woman sitting beside her, well rouged and powdered and with a very small pointed nose.

"My sister-in-law, Chunmei," she said.

Li Fei sat down. "Won't you dance with me?"

"Really I don't know how to. Do you enjoy it?"

"It depends on whom you dance with. If you don't dance, I won't. I am happier talking with you."

"How does one dance?" Chunmei asked.

Li Fei said: "Would you like me to show you?"

Chunmei had been watching, fascinated. She stood up, the soft material revealing her graceful contour. Beautiful and young, she presented an attractive figure. They tried a few steps in the corner. Chunmei was happy tonight because the victory at home gave her a sense that she had definitely stepped across a line. A woman with Chunmei's natural grace took to dancing as fish to water. She lifted one arm high and stepped back and forth in rhythm. They went back to their seats.

Chunmei said to Jo-an: "Why don't you learn? There is nothing to it."

"I am too lazy," replied Jo-an. She had a feeling that she might enjoy dancing with Li Fei, but it had to be in a sacred, intimate world of her own, away from the stare of the public.

They saw the governor's tall figure striding towards them. He had seen Chunmei practising in the corner and had been attracted by her striking figure. He came up in front of her, and did not bow, but stretched his broad-sleeved arms towards her in a childish and irresistible gesture of invitation.

"You want me to dance?" asked Chunmei.

"Certainly," he said as his blubber lips moved into an open smile. It had the ring of a command.

She stood up, and before she had adjusted her dress properly, the governor had swept her off. Jo-an was frightened for her, but in a second they saw that Chunmei was moving about gracefully.

"Who are you?" asked the governor.

"A country girl," Chunmei replied merrily, conscious that the others were looking.

"And I was a peasant boy. We who have sense and courage always rise to the top."

The governor had a tendency to lean forward over her, and Chunmei leaned backwards, supporting herself on the strong arm of her partner at the waist and letting him carry her, while her steps moved quickly and responsively. She had a naturally good figure, soft and supple, which almost melted in the governor's arms. Soon everybody was asking who the mysterious

lady was. Sianghua, looking from the corner, admired her new 'sister-in-law' for her pluck. The Manchurian general came up and wanted to cut in, but the governor smiled and said: "Oh, no." People looking on laughed at the rebuff, and the young commander walked away laughing.

Fan came up to Li Fei, and looking at his watch said: "We must go."

Li Fei stood up. Jo-an saw the grave expression on their faces and was sorry at this unhappy interruption.

"Fan has some guests at home," he explained. "Walk a step with me."

Slowly she rose and followed them through the crowd.

"Can you come to my house tomorrow?" he whispered. "I must see you. You must come to me because I cannot come to your house."

She promised and went back to her seat, while the friends silently and unobtrusively left the hall.

It was half-past eleven when Fan returned to his house with Li Fei. O-yun's father was already there, waiting with Lang anxiously, but his daughter had not appeared.

"Don't worry. She will be here," Fan said quickly. "Did you bring the things?"

Old Tsui pointed to a blue cloth package on the couch.

"I brought some of O-yun's better clothes. I could not bring everything."

"You take a nap. When she is here, we will wake you."

10

THE NIGHT WAS SILENT IN THE GOVERNOR'S GARDEN HOME. IT was in a back section of the north city, enclosed by mud walls. The front gate led to the house by a long pebble walk of mosaics, lined with fruit trees on both sides, while the back consisted of large tracts of vegetable fields and stables close to a large wooden gate. Usually at this time of the night the house was brilliantly illuminated. Several cars would be parked at the entrance and guards would be on duty to keep away loiterers.

For Fan's men, this was a fairly simple assignment. Fan had planned it well. When he heard that O-yun was being kept in the garden house instead of the Manchu quarter, his problem had been simplified. He had planned for his men to climb over the low mud wall when everybody was asleep, force the gardener to tell where O-yun was, and bring her out.

Flying Whip and Leopard Three were experts. They had no fear of the guards. They knew the element of surprise and were quick with their weapons. Their pastime was lifting on a pole millstones weighing four or five hundred pounds. O-yun could not weigh much over a hundred. They were enthusiastic when they had something to do. The White Lotus Society, six centuries old, did not exist for nothing. Through changing dynasties, these secret societies of free and brave men survived and penetrated the lower strata of society. They survived because people wanted protection, and when the government could not give it they protected themselves. When the government was good and just, their numbers dwindled, but, even then, boxing and the mysteries of a secret brotherhood pledged to help one another always attracted some people. When the government was bad, the secret societies mushroomed and spread and were joined by the farmers who were taxed out of existence. Led by some religious leader, they became a formidable political force which threatened empires, the Boxer uprising being a good example. A long tradition of loyalty and discipline, with their gradations of rank, their mutual help in paying debts on New Year's Eve and at the other festivals, and their assistance to members in a strange city, made them a brotherhood in the true sense of the word, designed for such times as these. To their own members one could trust one's own unmarried daughter on a distant journey, or in the case of long-standing friendships could entrust the care of one's widow and children on one's deathbed.

When Fan heard that there was to be a ball and the Manchurian war-lord would be away, he felt even less worry, for he did not want to hurt anybody when he attempted to get O-yun out. He was less worried about getting her out than about what was going to happen after she escaped.

He had sent his servant Lu to Flying Whip, and Lu had sought him out in one of their rendezvous.

"Tell Grand-uncle Fan that I will deliver O-yun by midnight. Isn't this as easy as eating bean-curd?"

In spite of what he said, Flying Whip never neglected the essential ceremonies. He winked for Leopard Three to follow him. They went into a wine-shop, asked for two catties of boiled beef and wheat cakes and, after a quick meal, bought an earthen pot of wine. Next they went into an incense shop and, throwing down two coppers, bought a packet of incense.

"Leopard Three, you go and find Liu and tell him to park a rickshaw by the lotus pond. We are coming through that way. Tell him to have the rickshaw well covered, but light an incense stick on the ground and wait for us. We shall be there about midnight."

Flying Whip returned to his two-room house. After another drink of wine, he felt fine. Soon Leopard Three pushed open the door and said that Liu had been instructed.

Whenever Flying Whip was about to begin one of his adventures, he felt he was being useful and liked to speak of his last exploits, including how he had beaten up a captain and escaped from a Honan army. His head was filled with heroes like the Monk Lu, who ate dog meat, and Wu Sung, the tiger-killer. He had once tried to eat dog meat, but after swallowing two catties he threw up everything. After that his admiration for the monk was unbounded. How the monk could eat a whole dog, as told in the story, was something which mystified him and confirmed him in his favourite theory.

"We are no good. We moderns can never compare with the ancients."

Life in the past three months had been too tranquil. But spring had come and, with so many soldiers and visitors in the city, he expected something to happen so that he could use his muscles again.

"Thank heaven for that north-eastern bastard. Without his kidnapping O-yun, I wouldn't know what to do this spring. And now I don't have to worry when the Dragon Boat Festival comes around. Grand-uncle Fan always remembers. Come on."

He lighted the joss-sticks and went out to his courtyard and stuck the incense into the ground. Placing three cups of wine on the ground, he and Leopard Three stood facing the south-

eastern sky and made three bows and prayed for protection in their expedition. He raised his head and looked for a shooting star—called a thief star. He waited some five minutes tensely for one to appear. When a bright thief star shot across the heavens he touched his hand to his brow and felt happy. He was in touch with the mysterious spirits that peopled the heavens and guided men's fates. Sometimes his eyes dwelt on the twinkling twin eyes of the Celestial Dog in the south sky and he wondered what would happen to that dog if Monk Lu's spirit should come across him in heaven when he had drunk too much.

Satisfied with the good omen, he left the incense glowing on the ground and re-entered his house with his companion.

He was especially happy when he thought of his assignment. Something stirred in his heart when he recalled the girl he had admired on the stage.

"Let me carry O-yun when we get her out," said Leopard Three.

Flying Whip eyed him. "Your indecent mind! I know what you are thinking of. I will carry her myself."

The two men got ready. They gathered their jackets inside the broad, black, cloth waistbands which concealed their weapons, and tied black scarves around their heads. Besides preventing anyone from grabbing their hair, the black scarf served many useful purposes, such as masking their faces or blindfolding their enemy.

* * * * *

O-yun had had a troubled day and night. When she was taken away in the car, her heart was a-quiver because of the soldiers with her. She knew she was invited to entertain, but she had the feeling of being arrested. She would give her performance, be courteous, and then go home.

When she was taken to the governor's house, she saw a group of men and women at the dinner-table, eating and drinking in the brilliantly lighted room. All eyes turned on her when she entered.

The soldiers had let go of her arms and stood behind her.

"This is Governor Yang." O-yun made her bow, and then said: "Governor, am I under arrest?" Blood surged to her

face as her eyes swept over the beautifully dressed company at the table.

"Why, no," the governor answered with a laugh. "I have sent for you to entertain us tonight."

He motioned to the two soldiers to retire. A servant put a chair away from the table for O-yun and served her a cup of tea.

An awkward quarter of an hour passed. The company went on eating and drinking, ignoring her. As she watched, anger rose slowly in her. It was one of those long feasts which never seemed to come to an end. Between the courses there were long intervals of joking and finger-guessing and matching of wine-cups. After she had sat quietly so long there was a silence, and the young Manchurian general, looking at her, said: "Oh, there is Tsui O-yun. Let us hear one of her stories."

Some girl entertainers might regard it as a great honour to be invited to the governor's home and to entertain such important persons. O-yun, on the contrary, was greatly vexed. Her thought was to tell a story, get it quickly over and go home.

As luck would have it, while she was in the midst of telling her story, the servant brought in a big dish of sweetened studded rice, which seemed to indicate the end of the feast.

"Come, you must eat this while it is hot." The governor's wife's loud, coarse voice jarred on her ears.

One by one her listeners picked up their spoons and began to help themselves to the new dish. Hardly anyone was listening.

With a sudden irascible tap on the small drum, O-yun stopped. The noise startled the company, and heads turned.

The young commander got up and escorted her to the table. "You must eat something."

"Thank you, but I am not hungry."

"Sit down." Somebody pulled up a chair and held it for her.

"If you want me to tell another story, I'll do so. But if not, I must go home."

The Manchurian general urged her, hand upon her shoulders.

"When the general asks you to sit down, you should obey," said the governor.

"I am unworthy."

"Don't argue." The young commander pressed her into her seat.

All eyes were upon her and she felt uncomfortable. The young commander proposed a toast to her. She barely tasted a sip. The commander came up to her and holding a cup high said: "Come, that won't do. Kanpei."

"I really cannot. I am not used to assisting at wine dinners."

The governor's wife spoke. "The general is doing you a great honour. I have not yet seen a girl entertainer who does not know the rules and gives herself airs."

"You must excuse me. I have a headache. Can I go home?"

"No, you stay here tonight."

O-yun was now frightened.

"There is a nice room inside. If you want to rest, you can." His hand was again upon her shoulder.

"If O-yun is tired, she should go and lie down," said the adjutant's wife. "The general has a headache too. Both should go and lie down a bit and both headaches will be cured."

O-yun's temper was short. "I am a working girl, not like you ladies. My headache is not cured by sleeping in others' husbands' beds."

"That wench! How she dares!" said the governor's wife.

"Leave it to me," said the young commander. "You people don't know how to deal with a woman. Come," he said to her gently. "You go and lie down a bit. My car will send you home."

"Then send me home now. I don't want to lie down."

O-yun was not so much frightened now by the governor's guards as by the young commander's eyes. "I tell you, you gentlemen and ladies all have husbands and wives. Why can't you let a poor girl alone? My songs are for sale, but my body is my own!"

The governor stood up. "General, I apologise. I did not think a common street entertainer would dare to be so rude."

Before O-yun knew it, guards laid hands upon her and dragged her into a private room. She locked the door and looked about the room. There was a luxurious imported bed and a heavy carpet on the floor. Still angry, she waited to see what would happen.

The noise of laughter went on outside.

Strangely enough, they left her alone, though she waited for

hours with the lights turned off, afraid to go to sleep. Gradually she fell into slumber.

In the morning she got up, surprised that nothing had happened. She opened the door and saw a guard. She went up to him and said that she wanted to go home.

"No. The general is still in bed. And I don't think you are leaving."

During the day she peered out of the window and tried to find out where she was. From her back window she could see a vegetable-patch and the stables, and over the back wall of the garden she saw the city wall. The sunlight falling upon it told her that it must be the northern wall. Towards the west, she could see from the narrow angle of her window only a great many fruit trees, and she wondered where the garden led to.

Apparently the young commander had forgotten about her, or, having her securely in his house, wanted to give her time. He was out all day. At supper-time she heard someone knocking at her door, and she opened it. The young commander was there.

"How are you?" he asked. "It was very foolish of you to act like that last night."

"Please, won't you let me go home?" she pleaded.

"I am going out tonight. I will come and talk with you after I come back. But you are a foolish girl to make such a fuss about nothing." She hated the smile on his face, though he spoke very smoothly and politely.

She had her supper served in her room. Later she heard the tooting of horns and the starting of cars going away. The house was strangely quiet. So far as she was aware, only a woman servant was near her, though the kitchen was lighted and she heard noises there.

She surveyed the orchard beneath her window. She was sure there were guards at the entrance, but she might be able to find an escape elsewhere. A pale moon in the sky lit the garden with patches of weird shadows. Near the stables she heard a man's steps and saw the form of a guard pacing the stone pavement before the wooden gate and, once in a while, the gleam of a bayonet when the guard turned about.

Then the kitchen light went out. She looked at a watch on the desk. It was eleven o'clock. She put out her light and lay quietly, pretending to be asleep.

"O-yun," the woman servant called from behind the door.

"I am here."

"Be a good girl and go to sleep."

"I am fine. You go to sleep, too." She heard the woman's slow steps move away.

Stealthily she got up. The window was seven or eight feet above the ground and she should be able to let herself down without too much noise, if she took off her shoes. Even if she was caught, the worst that could happen would be to be shut up again. She had nothing to lose.

She looked towards the stables for the shadowy form of the guard. All was quiet. Holding her shoes in her hand, she let herself out of the window, and fell down with a thud on the ground outside. In the fall, one of her shoes had dropped from her hand. She crouched and waited to see if anything moved. Luckily, no one had heard her. Her eyes were adjusted to the dark night and she found her shoe, and crept slowly across an open space and dashed towards the shadows of the orchard. The crackling of every dry twig under her feet frightened her. Dew was already forming on the grass and her ankles were wet. She headed towards the darker west where the foliage was thicker. Fifty yards away she came to a wall. The wall was about ten feet high and there was no possibility of her climbing over it. She trudged along it and found a date tree leaning across the wall, but the branches were small, and she did not know what to do. She looked towards the stables and saw, in the starlight, a dark human form. She might be able to get up to the roof of the stables and jump out, but she dared not move in that direction.

In despair, she tramped back over the wet grass towards the heavy shadows. She could not get back to her room again. As she was standing under a tree and wondering what to do next, she heard a voice whisper in the dark: "O-yun, are you not O-yun?" She let out a piercing scream. All her nerves stood on end.

Two dark human forms rushed towards her. "Keep quiet!" she heard. Before she knew it, Flying Whip's hand had covered her mouth from behind. "We've come to get you out, Grand-uncle Fan sent us."

"Who is there?" a voice shouted. Through the trees, they

saw a dark form dashing madly about, torch jerking in all directions. The guard, following the direction of the scream, was coming towards them.

"Don't make a sound," whispered Flying Whip as they crouched in the shadows. The torch came nearer and nearer. Flying Whip knelt with one knee on the ground and got himself ready. The guard's torch caught O-yun's light blue gown.

"Come out!" the guard shouted, while he put his whistle to his mouth.

Just at that moment, a black metallic weapon, shaped like a stone-cutter's drill with a pointed end, was sent flying and hit the guard's chest. He dropped, his torch tumbling on to the grass.

"Let's get out of here quick! The guards in front may have heard that squeal of yours."

Flying Whip took the girl in his arms and dashed among the shadows along the wall. The light in the kitchen came on.

"There," Flying Whip said as he came to the date tree and let the girl down. They turned back to look. The light in O-yun's room was on, too.

"Leopard Three, get up on the wall and help her over while I push her up."

When Leopard Three had got up on the wall, Flying Whip crouched down, asked O-yun to sit on his shoulder and then rose to his feet until Leopard Three could reach for her safely. Then with one hop up the date tree, Flying Whip jumped up to the wall. There were already rushing steps coming from the front of the house, running wildly in uncertain directions.

Flying Whip spat across the wall before he jumped down, for good luck, as the custom was. The process was reversed and the three of them were safely on the outside.

Flying Whip steadied himself. He always felt over his body during an exit to make sure he had not left something behind. Two more drills were still safely in his waistband.

There was a cluster of trees just near the wall, but beyond was a tract of ground crossed by a mule-cart road sunk three or four feet below the ground-level.

"We are safe," said Flying Whip as he carried the girl on his back and prepared to descend. "It will take those bastards

half an hour before they find out where we are. And I don't think they will risk their life chasing us."

The moon had come out of a thin cloud and lit the sombre ground, making their progress easier. At this time of the night the road was completely deserted. Flying Whip let the girl down when they reached the base of the city wall. They found a flight of steps, went up and crept along the city wall towards the North Gate tower, where in its shadow they surveyed the governor's house with satisfaction. Crouching under the cover of the parapets, they moved again for a distance until they judged they were free from observation. O-yun's legs were weak with the excitement. Leaning on the two men's shoulders, she limped along. It took them twenty minutes following the eastern wall to reach the exit where they could descend without being noticed.

Finding the rickshaw marked by the faint light of the glowing incense, they put O-yun in it. Then they took off their scarves and waistbands and walked into the deserted alleyways. A policeman peered into the covered rickshaw.

"It is my mother. She is sick," Flying Whip said.

They reached Fan's home when it was ten minutes past midnight.

* * * * *

O-yun's arrival was received with a hushed excitement. Lang and Fan and Li Fei were waiting anxiously for her. She fell on her father's shoulders and wept, and his eyes were moist with happiness.

"Oh, my daughter! Have they done anything to you?"

She raised her face and shook her head proudly. "But I was so afraid."

"Quickly bow down and thank your adopted father for saving you out of a tiger's cave." He made Fan sit in a chair to receive the bow and said: "He is really your parent of a second life."

Calling Fan "Kantieh," she sank down on her knees. She would have knocked her head on the floor three times, but Fan, smiling, said: "Don't do that" and lifted her up and said: "Now you are really my adopted daughter. You had better thank the brothers for risking their lives to save you."

O-yun turned and made a bow to the men who had brought her home.

"Did you hurt anybody?" Fan asked.

"I never miss. The man dropped dead on the spot," said Flying Whip. As he told the story the lines on Fan's brows deepened.

"I wish you hadn't had to kill a man. The police will be after her. If she is ever found, we are finished.

"I don't think so," replied O-yun. "You have saved me. They can torture and kill me, but I will never tell."

Fan told the brothers to go home.

"Slip out quickly. And do not stir out of your houses unless you have to. If you need money, come to me. Ask Liu to park his rickshaw at the entrance of the alley. I may need him."

When the brothers were gone Fan said: "We have a problem. The police will try to find out who helped her escape.

The brief statement touched something in the girl's heart. She had been in a state of anger while she was shut up and thinking only of escape, and during the flight she was intent on reaching safety, too busy to think of anything else. Now that she was out of immediate danger, she suddenly thought of what might happen, and she broke down crying. Once she allowed her tears to fall, she seemed to have no more control of herself.

"We are ruined," she said between her sobs. "Where can Father and I go?"

She was conscious that a gentle hand had been laid upon her back. "Don't cry. You have many friends here who want to help you." It was the hand and the voice of Lang.

"Go and lie down on the couch," said Fan. "We will think of a way to get you to safety." Her father came and pulled her up, and she let herself be led to the couch. When Lang threw his overcoat over her, she was touched deeply. Her young heart felt grateful. It did not seem to her possible that some men could be so wicked and some so kind. Shedding tears had tired her and she fell into a drowsy stupor.

Fan told his servant to put out the ceiling-light and retire. The four of them sat around the table in the subdued light of a red desk-lamp. Li Fei had never come so close to human

baseness, and it outraged his every sense of decency. A slow anger rose in him and the blood pounded in his brain.

"If this sort of thing can happen, what next? It must be stopped," he said.

"Who is going to stop it?"

"The newspapers. O-yun will not appear on the stage. Her disappearance will become known. A man has been killed. The public will want to know what happened. Were it not for O-yun, I could let the people know. But I know I can't write about her."

"Our job is to get O-yun to safety now," said Fan.

One thing was certain. O-yun could not appear in public any more, unless it was far away or under some official's patronage. The killing of the guard had created a problem they had not anticipated. O-yun would be wanted by the police to find out who had killed the guard and who was the accomplice. She would have to go into hiding and change her identity.

"You shouldn't be travelling with O-yun," said Fan to her father. "It will risk her being discovered. You go to Tienshui. I will give you names of persons. There is a village fair tomorrow. You start early and slip in among the crowd and get out of the city at dawn. We will hide your daughter until the search has quieted down."

11

GOVERNOR YANG WAS WAKED AT NINE O'CLOCK BY AN AIDE WHO said: "Commander Tai has called and wants to see you."

Governor Yang raised himself in bed.

Commander Tai of the Si-an police was a man with a squarish face, marked by a long black moustache and black-rimmed spectacles. He stood erect at the governor's bedside and reported that O-yun had escaped and that one of the Manchurian guards had been killed in his garden.

The governor sat up, the flesh under his chin shaking.

"This is an insult! Who would dare do this—and in my home, too! It makes me lose face before the general, to think

that I cannot protect one of his guards." He snorted and snarled, and his broad face widened, emphasising the inverted oval which formed a continuous line with the neck above his silk pyjamas.

"Get me my brother-in-law," he shouted into the telephone, and cursed to himself. "I'll get to the bottom of this."

His brother-in-law, Shih, chief of police, answered. The governor gave the order that a thorough search was to be made for the murderer. "And don't think you'll keep your job if you fail!"

* * * * *

After lunch Jo-an came to call on Li Fei. She was dressed simply in a plain deep blue gown with a red shawl around her neck. She found Li's sister-in-law in the parlour.

"Li Fei asked me to come," she explained.

"Yes, he has told me," Tuanerh answered, and got up and left her.

It was a bright day and Jo-an was hoping she would be able to spend the Sunday afternoon with Li Fei. She had left her house rather impatiently. Nothing seemed right in the house. At lunch her aunt did not appear, her uncle ate silently, and when the master was upset, Chunmei was quiet also, keeping herself busy with the children. For a moment they talked of the ball of the previous night and the persons they had seen. But the master's unpleasant state of mind hung like a pall over the table and Jo-an was glad to get out of the house.

As she sat in Li Fei's parlour, her heart fluttered. From the abrupt manner in which Li Fei and Fan had left the ball, she felt that something was happening. She was curious and intended to ask him. She was not kept waiting long. Li Fei came out and took her hands warmly in greeting, but his face wore a troubled look.

"We can go out together," she said.

"Yes." He responded with less than his usual enthusiasm.

She studied his face and said: "Do you know a man has been murdered, and the police are searching every house? Tangma said the gates of the city are blocked by policemen."

"That is true." She saw the gravity of his face.

"Would they search your house?" he asked.

"They wouldn't dare."

"Would you dare hide somebody in your own court?" He looked at her for a moment and then said: "No, I was foolish to ask that. I don't want to get you involved."

"Are you in danger?" she asked quickly.

"My friends are in trouble."

"Tell me everything. You can trust me, and I will do anything I can."

He told her what had happened. "This involves a girl's honour. We must think of some way to help," he concluded.

Jo-an was greatly shocked to hear the story. Her face was buried in thought.

"Was that what was happening while we were at the ball? But Fan was there at the ball himself."

"That was his game. He didn't have to do it himself. I went after the ball and saw O-yun herself. I don't know what will happen when they come to search Fan's house."

"If they catch O-yun, won't you all be involved?"

At this moment they were interrupted by the entrance of Lang, who came in excitedly. He took Li aside and whispered to him.

"Miss Tu is all right. She knows everything," Li said.

"They are combing street by street," Lang said. "Her father started out early this morning. Wenpo asks me to come and see if it is safe for O-yun to come here. They might not come this way. We must get her to some place where it is safe."

"There is just as much danger here," Li Fei said.

Jo-an spoke quickly. "If you want to get her out of the city, I have a suggestion. It is risky, but I think it can be done."

"How?"

"My uncle's car! The police know the licence-plate. They won't stop it."

"But Jo-an, can you get the car? You would be taking a great responsibility."

"I can. It will be the first time it was ever put to good use. But somebody has to drive it."

"I'll drive it if you are willing to take the risk."

Jo-an glanced at him in concern for a second. Then she bit her lip, put her hand resolutely on the telephone, picked it up and called Sianghua.

"Who will drive you?" Sianghua asked.

"Li Fei. I would like to go out alone with him, if you don't mind."

"Send him over, then."

Jo-an hung up the phone and breathed heavily. "Now I have told a lie," she said with a smile.

Li Fei and Lang were surprised by Jo-an's action. She had seemed an unpractical and quiet, dreamy sort of girl from a rich family, rather retiring in public. They did not think she would have the courage to take action. Jo-an knew that Li Fei was in trouble, and in that moment she knew what she must do and did it without a moment's hesitation.

"What if we are caught?" asked Li Fei.

"I don't think we will be," Jo-an replied. "Not in that car. There are only two Packards in the whole of Si-an, the police commissioner's and our own. All policemen know it. I know the nuns of the Tsukuang Temple, of which my uncle is a great patron. We can hide O-yun there. We'll make up an outing party to the northern suburb."

"Come, we have to hurry," said Lang. "You two fetch the car while I go back to get O-yun ready."

Li Fei said: "O-yun will come as my sister-in-law and I'll take my nephews along. Jo-an's right. I believe we can get through."

When Lang arrived at Fan's house, Fan was sitting lazily in his jacket, pretending to be reading a newspaper while keeping an eye out for the police. He sat up quickly when Lang whispered their plan to smuggle O-yun out in the ex-mayor's car.

"I didn't know Miss Tu could be of such help. I hate to involve her, but there's no other way."

Fan quickly went in to tell O-yun, who was hiding disguised as a servant. Her eyes were distraught with mortal fear for her life. She had cut off her bangs, and had asked a woman servant to put a false bun at the back of her head.

"Don't look like that," said Fan. "Be angry. Think of those bastards and what they might do to you and you'll not be afraid."

The beautiful Packard soon pulled up at the entrance with Jo-an and Li Fei in it. Silently they packed in. The car

stopped at Li Fei's home to pick up the children and they started off for the North Gate. Li Fei and Lang sat in front while O-yun sat with Jo-an in the back seat with the small children. Ing, the eldest girl, was put prominently in the front.

"You are my sister-in-law," said Li Fei to O-yun. Her face was white and her lips quivered. Jo-an held her hand and said: "Don't worry. This car is as good as the police commissioner's own. We will tell them we are going to visit my grandfather's cemetery."

At the North Gate there were two or three gendarmes in their olive-green uniform with red bands on their caps, besides six or seven policemen in black uniform and white puttees. They scanned the people coming towards the gate, and peeped into covered rickshaws.

Jo-an slipped a card into Li Fei's hand, and whispered: "This is Tsujen's card. Toot your horn, and don't stop. Hand the policeman this card if they stop us."

Thoughts were passing quickly in Li Fei's head as he tooted the horn impatiently. "Play with the child and smile," Jo-an whispered to O-yun.

A policeman came up and saluted.

Li Fei handed him Tsujen's card without looking at him while he talked casually with Lang. The policeman smiled and motioned for the car to go forward.

"What is this all about?" Li Fei asked.

"Somebody has been murdered. We have orders to search people leaving the city. Good day, Mr. Tu. The peach flowers are in bloom."

The policeman did not even look inside the car. He shouted for the others to make room. Li Fei tooted the horn again and the car slid gracefully out of the gate.

O-yun's hands were wet as she held Toi tightly. When the car had gone a short distance, she slouched down in her seat and heaved a great sigh.

"I told you we would get through," said Jo-an exultingly.

Li Fei turned and asked: "Weren't you afraid?"

Jo-an replied: "Just a little. But it was a safe bet. We'll pick a lot of flowers and load them in the car before we come back."

Lang laughed. "When we go back*they can search all they like. Old Fan will laugh when we tell him the story."

The car sped on for about three miles, where the land rose towards the north-west and they could see a low hill with a cypress grove near the top. Pointing to the grove, Jo-an said to Li Fei: "There is our family cemetery. The Tsukuang Temple is at the foot of that hill."

"What now?" asked Lang.

"We'll go to the temple. The nuns know me. You let me talk with them. There is no safer place for O-yun than the convent. She can stay there until this thing has died down and you can arrange to take her to join her father."

The car went through the outer gate of the temple, ascended a short distance, and drew up at the entrance. The party alighted from the car and Lang hastened to help O-yun. As the girl stepped out of the car, it appeared as if she was ready to collapse.

"You are safe now," Lang said to comfort her. The spring sun was shining full upon her face and there were dark rings under her eyes. She looked back upon the city apprehensively. It was hard for her to believe that she was really out of danger.

"Nobody will find you here," said Jo-an.

Li Fei looked at Jo-an and she threw a quick glance at him. "You are a brave girl."

"Let's go up," Jo-an said by way of reply.

Li Fei asked the little children to follow him, Jo-an took Ing's hand, and Lang assisted O-yun up towards the entrance, the party looking indeed very much like a group of tourists on a spring outing.

They went up a flight of stone steps, leading from the side of the convent towards an old stone terrace. The place was absolutely quiet. The outer temple was a small square building.

O-yun sat on the steps of the front temple, her head in her hands, bewildered. Her fears had not left her.

Jo-an had gone behind the shrine while they waited outside. Behind there was a gate of wooden stakes with a sign: "Sacred precincts of the convent. Loiterers are forbidden."

Li Fei saw a series of rooms on the inside, connected with the temple by a covered corridor.

"There are only two nuns in this convent," said Jo-an. "You stop here while I go in to speak to them."

The children were playing in the yard, and Li Fei went out to play with them. O-yun, stopping before the Buddha, said she would like to burn some incense and say a prayer. There were packages of incense-sticks lying on the edge of the altar. She took a package, lighted the sticks, and stood them in the big black tripod. Then she knelt on the straw cushion in front of the shrine, mumbled her prayer of thanks and asked for protection for herself and her father, kow-towed on the ground and rose.

Lang stood by, watching the small girlish figure rising from her knees.

"I have made a pledge," said O-yun, "that if everything goes well and I can meet my father in safety, I will come back and offer my thanks."

"O-yun, if you want me to, I will take you to your father. You have a good rest here for a few days and wait until the search is over. Then I'll be glad to go with you." Lang's voice was soft and quivered a little.

As O-yun thought of her father, her eyes filled, and she smiled through her tears.

"Thank you. Somebody has to go with me," she said.

They heard footsteps behind the shrine, and Jo-an came out with an old nun in a grey robe and a black hat.

"I have arranged with the kuku to let O-yun stop here for a few days.

The old nun looked at O-yun and taking her hands said: "Poor girl. How could they do such a thing to you? You'll be safe here. You are a good girl and Buddha will bless you." Her eyes turned to the others. "But you people should not come and visit her. It might attract attention. She can stay here as long as she needs to. Nobody ever comes this way, and if you people keep quiet, no one will ever know."

Lang handed to the nun the small cloth parcel containing O-yun's clothing.

O-yun looked at Lang and said: "Since you people have come this far, please stay a while." She was young and her father had always been with her, and now she felt sad to have to part with them and be left alone.

Tea was served and everybody had a feeling of having done a job well and successfully. Jo-an sat with Ing leaning against her.

"This is a strange outing," said Li Fei. "Jo-an, honestly I did not think you would take the risk."

"Why not?"

"Because you are usually so quiet."

Jo-an did not reply.

Li Fei asked the old nun: "Tell us how you came to leave your family and enter the order."

While they drank their tea and cracked melon seeds, they listened to the nun's story. "I came from Honan. Wasn't there a big famine in the first year of Emperor Shuantung? My husband had been conscripted into the army and had not been heard of. I was living with my mother-in-law and a one-year-old child. The land was parched dry and there was not a single green blade left. Those who could move went down towards the river, and those who remained ate barks and roots. Finally even the barks and edible roots ran out, and there was no firewood to make even a cup of hot water. My milk dried up. My mother-in-law said to me: 'Daughter, you take my grandson and leave this place.' She was too old and sick to move. I took the baby at my breast and went along with the refugees and begged for food. We heard there was food in Si-an and came west. More and more peasants joined us. I hugged my baby and trudged along. He lay so still because he did not have anything to eat for days, and he did not open his eyes any more. Finally I found that he was dead. I was afraid to throw him away on the roadside or to bury him, for I might be seen by the hungry refugees. So I carried him along and said nothing, and at night I lay down with him in my breast for fear someone might snatch him away during my sleep. I was walking in a daze. The next day at dusk I saw a temple and went towards it. My strength was giving out and I fell unconscious. There was a good monk who saved my life. When I woke up, I was lying on the floor of the temple and the monk gave me rice soup and I gradually revived. I buried my baby at the back of the temple and the monk was good enough to let me stay at the temple and gather firewood for him. Then he told me about this convent and I came and

cut off my hair. I have been here now for twenty-three years."

The contrast between the tragedy of the nun's story and her calm and gentle way of telling it made it seem as if she were telling about someone else.

"And are you happy here?" Li Fei asked.

The old nun smiled. "I am contented."

O-yun had been listening with so much interest to the nun's story that she forgot her own troubles. She said slowly: "If it was not for my father, it would be a quiet and peaceful life for me to become a nun."

"No, my daughter," said the old nun. "You are young. You have your life to live yet. I do not advise young girls to enter the sisterhood. You should have a good husband and live to serve your old father. The important thing is to do good deeds and plant good seeds in this life. You just watch—that scoundrel who wanted to hurt you will be born a dog or a donkey to be ridden by you in the next incarnation."

The company laughed and rose to go. Lang took out ten dollars and gave them to the nun and said: "Take good care of her."

O-yun came out with them as far as the tenace, sad to see them leave. She would have gone down to the entrance, but they told her not to. She saw the car go down the hill until it passed the outer gate. Then she turned and entered the convent.

Li Fei drove home with a puzzled mind. At the ball Jo-an was so quiet and didn't care to dance and said she "did not mind being left behind", but she did things other girls would not. For the first time, he saw an unusual trait in this quiet girl. 'Just like her father,' he thought to himself.

When Lang returned home, he found Fan in an exultant mood.

"The police came," he said. "I invited them in. There were two of them, a sergeant and another. I gave them a cup of wine and we had a very nice chat."

They had been polite. "We have orders to search houses and report. Of course, Mr. Fan, you do not mind."

"Of course not."

The sergeant followed Fan inside with an apology that he was only doing his duty. They made a perfunctory search. Fan gave them wine and asked them to sit down.

"What is it all about?" he asked.

"Haven't you heard? The girl story-teller has disappeared from the governor's home and a Manchurian guard has been murdered."

"Murdered! Who would dare?"

"You know Tsui O-yun."

"Who doesn't?"

"What is more, her father has disappeared, too."

"I go to hear Tsui O-yun quite often. But her father is too old. He couldn't have rescued the girl, not to speak of killing a guard."

"We are doing our duty," said the sergeant. "But it's stupid. I don't believe the girl is in the city. The man should have taken her out of the city long before daybreak."

"So you think the culprit will not be found?"

"Yes. I tell you, all this is done as a show for the Manchurian guest. If the governor did not do something, he would lose face. Those Manchurian soldiers have caused enough trouble in this city. We are sick of them. And now we people of Si-an can't hear O-yun again. What a beautiful voice!" He jerked his head and his eyes rolled.

"Let's hope that she has escaped unharmed. I hope that the Manchurian did not do anything to her," said Fan.

The sergeant snorted. "The beast! Our Si-an girls won't be safe any more. What a scandal it will be when the people know!"

"To O-yun!" Fan raised a cup.

"To O-yun!" responded the sergeant.

12

THE TRAIN PULLED IN TO THE SHIENYANG STATION IN THE DARK. There were not many passengers on the platform. In the dim light Lang carried a big suitcase and a cloth parcel. The young girl with him was dressed as a peasant in blue cotton. Her hair

was done up in a bun and she wore a scarf to cover the sides of her face and neck. Her peasant dress contrasted strangely with a leather strap on her shoulder carrying a camera.

It had been an exciting journey from the temple to the railway station. They had started in the mid-afternoon in a mule-wagon. The countryside was beautiful enough, but the wagon was carefully covered in front as well as on the sides. O-yun had a feeling of insecurity, of being hounded out of the country.

As the wagon rumbled down the mud road, she suddenly realised that Lang had always been kind to her. In the four-hour journey, she began to see that Lang was different from Fan, who had protected her in a fatherly way. In Lang's face she saw a special tenderness and heard it in his voice when he spoke to her.

Her clear round eyes peered over the cloth screen in front while Lang sat beside her. She had a sense that a romance was beginning. But he was far above her, and she checked herself. She felt that Lang was just another rich man's son who found it easy to conquer girls' hearts, that he probably had known many girls. He was not of her class, and she should be careful not to give her heart to him or she would regret it.

"O-yun," he said, "since that day in the country, I have never stopped thinking of you. You know my heart."

"I know. But it is an illusion."

He protested.

"You saw me on the stage," she went on, "and thought you liked me. I tell you it is an illusion. You are poetic, and I have no right to deceive you. You don't know me."

"But I do. How can I make you understand?"

"I am a working girl. I have never been to school like Miss Tu. I have fought boys in the streets and rolled in the mud with them."

"But that's fine! Perhaps you think that I am well-to-do and have been educated—you are prejudiced."

He looked at her proud face.

"That may be it. The poor and the rich don't mix. All I want when I am married is to take a basket and go to the market and cook my meals. You mustn't be offended." Her voice softened. "You are helping me out of trouble and I am saying all this."

He took out a cigarette and puffed it silently.

"You are a very good girl. And you don't like gentlemen."

"Really I don't."

He laughed in spite of himself. "Oh, well, I admit it is a disadvantage on my part. But is it my fault if my father has money?"

She looked at him out of the corner of her eyes. She saw that he was vexed.

"You people are good and you mustn't think I am not grateful."

They alighted at the station when it was eight. The train would not be due till nine, and Lang took her into a restaurant. Their talk had piqued him. He had known many women—pretty, sophisticated, and accomplished—in Shanghai and in Paris, and he had frankly been bored. As he cared little for politics and business and money-making, so the artificiality of society irked him. He had been seeking what was fresh and real in life. O-yun's naivety and innocence and independent spirit charmed him.

That day in the spring countryside he had been struck by her intelligence and her unspoiled freshness. She was strikingly beautiful when her figure blended with the country scene, trees, and the horses. He thought he had found in her a kindred spirit. Now, talking with her in the darkened restaurant, sitting so close to him, he thought her even more charming.

It was O-yun who pulled him back to a sense of the realities.

"What do you do in Si-an?" she asked.

"I paint and take photographs as a hobby. I have many hobbies."

"You must have some ambitions."

"I have no ambitions." Lang's bland voice emphasised his words.

"When I first saw you I thought you were a serious person, not like the rich men's sons who can only eat and flirt with girls."

"And now?"

"Now I don't know."

His pride was hurt. "What would you want me to do?"

"You could take a job. That is the way I was brought up. I can't conceive of a man not working or doing something."

"I tell you, in all this world only two classes of people are really useful, the mothers and the farmers. The mothers raise babies and the farmers raise food. They produce something. All the rest live by stealing what others produce. Governments steal from the people while they pretend to govern. They sit in their bureaus, sign papers forbidding people to do this and do that, and call it a day's work. The writers steal from the dead and make their thoughts, their very phrases, their own. The teachers steal the knowledge of others and peddle it to young children. The merchants steal, too, whenever they can. They can make money only by taking it away from somebody else. They produce nothing. Life is like taking in one another's laundry. You wash mine and I wash yours and we call it making a living. Why, a man who can beat a sheet of bronze into a kettle has more of my respect. Make it three classes, then. I include the mothers, the farmers and the artisans. I regard myself as an artisan. At least I produce photographs."

"With your education, you might do something to help the country," said O-vun naïvely.

"There are too many people trying to help the country. Everybody is doing something and everybody has his personal problems and is trying to help himself in the process. That is why everybody is helping the country."

When they got on to the train and had taken seats, they saw a group of some fifty soldiers in dirty grey cotton uniforms arrive on the platform and noisily climb into the carriages with their knapsacks and rifles. Their caps with fur-lined ear-flaps showed that they were Manchurian soldiers, parts of a homeless army without a base. They appeared like refugees, their only assets the rifles in their hands. There did not seem to be a captain with them, and they filed into the train helter-skelter.

"Matl!" one soldier shouted. "The railway is owned by the state, and the ticket-man wanted the state's soldiers to pay for tickets!" The buying of tickets had, as a matter of fact, become an outmoded institution.

"I offered him *fengpiao* and he wouldn't take it." *Fengpiao* was the notorious worthless Manchurian paper money.

It was a jolly, boisterous company which entirely overshadowed the civilian passengers. Lang learned that the soldiers were going north-west towards Turkestan. They had heard that

land was being offered to Manchurian refugees, and one of their own generals, Sheng Shih-tsai, was an important person there.

Because of the presence of the soldiers, O-yun sat close to Lang. The light from the ceiling was dim and she kept herself in the shadow. Lang put his arm around her waist and rubbed his cheek against her hair, and she did not mind. The soldiers' talk filled the car.

"Do you think the soldiers will recognise me?" she whispered.

"No," Lang assured her.

She had had a full meal, and after waiting as long as she could bear she said: "I must get up for a moment." The soldiers filled the corridor. She stood up, adjusted her gown and scarf, and pressed her way through the crowd. The appearance of a young feminine figure caused all eyes to turn to her.

"*Tuipuchu, chieh kuangerh,*" O-yun said as she edged her way through, using the typically northern word for asking people to make room. Some soldiers yielded with a smile. One grinned at her and made a coarse remark as she brushed against him. She turned around and gave him a slap in the face.

"You don't know your *laoniang*!" she cursed at him, using a dialect word for 'old mother'.

The soldier laughed. "*Haor!* It's not bad to have such a young and pretty *laoniang*."

O-yun went into the closet. The soldiers were gaily waiting for her to pass them on her way back. Lang was amused at her way with the soldiers, but he felt a little anxious.

"Isn't she like the story-teller?" one of them said.

"You are drunk."

"Why, she has the same face and eyes."

"I still say you are drunk."

O-yun kept herself long inside, hoping that she would not have to push through that crowd on her way back. When she came out the grinning soldier who had been slapped, shouted: "Make way for my pretty mother!" To her surprise the others made way.

"Say, have you ever been to Fengtien (Manchuria)?"

"Tsempu," she answered as she passed.

"A refugee like ourselves."

"She talks our accent!"

"It is good to hear a woman talking our accent."

She was flushed when she reached her seat and allowed herself to sink into the shadow again, snuggling closely to Lang.

"You certainly can handle men," he whispered.

"I can." She tossed her head and smiled.

Soon the noise subsided, and they heard the soldiers in front talking about their old home in Fengtien. As the night wore on, they became quieter. Some squatted on the floor and went to sleep. The car was stuffy and stank with garlic, and there was a chorus of snores. O-yun let her head rest on Lang's shoulder, lulled to sleep by the steady, rhythmic click-click of the train's wheels.

At Paochi they found the hotels fully booked up, owing to the great number of refugees from the coast. After some trouble, they were able to find a room in a country-style third-rate inn. The innkeeper demanded an exorbitant price because it had an enormous kang, or earthen bed heated from outside, big enough for four or five guests. Lang took it without question because it was the only accommodation he could find.

At night the question of 'gentleman' came up. O-yun had to undress, which meant merely taking off her gown. Lang took off his.

"I thought you would not trust yourself with a gentleman."

"I would trust a real one."

"You can trust me."

"Well, trust or not, my trousers' band is tied with a fast knot, I am telling you. We girls have respect for our bodies, if men don't."

"You don't have to be afraid."

She put out the light and undressed in the dark.

"Good-night," she said as she slid into the quilt.

"Good-night."

O-yun did not go to sleep at once. She heard Lang turning.

"Lang," she called softly in the dark.

"What is it?"

"What will my father think when I tell him that we slept in the same bed?"

"I am sure I don't know. I wonder what Fan and Li Fei will say when I tell them. They will think this is a fairy-tale."

After a while Lang said: "I am cold."

"If you keep your word of honour, I'll let you come nearer. Six inches."

Lang moved closer.

"You are warmer now?" whispered O-yun.

"Yes. It is good just to be near you."

"Aren't all girls the same to a man?"

"To Fan, yes. To me, no."

"I am just like any other girl."

"No, you are not."

"Now be quiet. We'll go to sleep."

She smiled in the dark and happily turned on her side away from him. He felt in a rather humiliating position, but he was charmed by O-yun's innocence. She was really falling asleep. He thought this a compliment to him and felt noble. Then he fell into a sweet slumber himself.

When in the dead of the night O-yun felt the weight of a hand on her chest, she lifted it gently. Lang was fast asleep. She dropped a silent kiss on his hand before she laid it away from her.

Book Three

SUNGANOR

13

A SITUATION HAD DEVELOPED IN SI-AN WHICH ANNOYED THE people of the city and did not reflect well on the Manchurian general. The theatres had been doing good business because, with the disturbances near Shanghai, many good actors and actresses had come to the North-West. O-yun's disappearance and the discontinuance of her programme and the search of the people's houses by the police had created a great deal of gossip. On the third day, all Si-an knew of the detention of the girl in the governor's house, and the public was enraged. It was a near scandal. Rumours were conflicting. Some thought O-yun had been murdered. One thing was certain, that the girl story-teller and her father had fled or were in hiding. Other actresses, taking warning from O-yun's case, had fled. Another tea-house cancelled its performance. Then the closing of two more theatres, on account of the disappearance of actresses from the city, made the playgoers of Si-an indignant.

The shopkeepers were unhappy with the Manchurian paper money, anyway. Some soldiers would buy a packet of cigarettes, present a worthless Manchurian dollar note, and demand change of ninety cents. The shopkeeper was forced to give away ninety cents in good money besides presenting the soldier with a packet of cigarettes. Other shops refused, and there had been a great deal of unpleasantness. Some papers mentioned the situation and commended it to the attention of the 'Manchurian authorities'. One evening paper, the *Sinwanpao*, suggested that the Manchurian troops should be forbidden entrance to the city, that it was the duty of the army to feed them and pay them in local currency, that the behaviour of the soldiers was

intolerable and something should be done about the situation.

The governor called for his brother-in-law, the police chief, and bawled at him: "I won't swallow this insult. By and by it won't be safe for me to sleep in my own house. I hear that the theatres are closing. Go and tell them to keep open as usual. Don't stand there! Say something!"

"Governor," said the hard-pressed brother-in-law, "you are giving me an impossible job. I can't force the theatres to keep open when there are no actresses."

The commissioner went to the governor's wife and explained his trouble.

"I am not a Buddha," said his sister. "But people come to me when they are in trouble. Don't worry. The theatres will reopen. The general has been here for two weeks now, and I don't mind his going back to Tungkwán. I have had enough of it myself. When he goes away, the actresses will come back by themselves."

The general did make his exit from Si-an two days afterwards. The affair of O-yun had attracted too much public attention.

With his return to Tungkwán, the actresses resumed their performances; other girl entertainers who had been officially 'sick' suddenly recovered their health, and the theatre world returned to normal.

Li Fei felt and thought like all the other native residents. The situation was not without its touch of humour, but he regarded the whole episode as an insult to the city. He knew Yang, the editor of the evening paper which had published criticisms of the Manchurian soldiers. Because of the paper's courage in outspoken criticism of things that were wrong, it was enjoying great popularity. There were many things an editor could do by suggestion, by indirection, and by typographical arrangement to express comments on a situation without getting into difficulty with the authorities. The day after the ball, the *Sinwanpao* had appeared with a report of the governor's and the general's speeches in parallel columns with a report of the disappearance of Tsui O-yun and the house-to-house search. When the *Tien-wailou* closed, the paper ran a headline in black type: 'AGAIN ANOTHER THEATRE CLOSED.' The word 'again' contained as much comment as a long editorial. Governor Yang was greatly displeased. He considered the paper 'anti-government'.

"It would be interesting just to tabulate by dates the past fortnight's events, beginning from the arrival of the general," said Li Fei.

"Why don't you do it?" said Yang. "I will publish it. Here, I give you all the back files. Just let the facts speak for themselves."

Now Li Fei was sitting at his desk watching the cigarette smoke being sucked into the shade of the big oil lamp and escaping above in lazy, curling patterns. He was not writing; he was just letting confusing impressions and thoughts pass through his mind. The shocking experience of O-yun and his own part in helping her escape weighed on his mind. He had seen and heard many things happen in local and national politics. Fellow newspaper-men exchanged many stories about this or that war-lord which they never wrote up to be published. These war-lords and generals seemed to be always so busy doing things. It seemed like a peculiarly human panorama of men doing things from a mixture of good and bad motives, of greed for power and political ambitions, and also of a kind of insatiable egotism, of a fight for survival in a changing, confusing society: Was Governor Yang a bad man? Li Fei hardly thought so. Yang was essentially a timid man who found himself governor of a province and did not quite understand how he got there.

Li Fei had many things in common with Lang, in their attitude towards the government and politics. But while Lang had gone so far as to lose all interest in politics, Li Fei, by his nature and his profession, could never feel himself entirely detached.

He had many friends among the so-called 'intellectuals'. They had usually studied political science abroad. Once he wrote in three hundred words the *Biography of an Intellectual*, which was widely read and appreciated, because he simply stated what was true. Such an intellectual, on his return from studies abroad, fired with new ideals, began to write articles of a scholarly and political nature, criticising this or that government policy with a proper display of learning. He was occupying a job as professor of political science in one of the many universities. If he criticised the government hard enough—and there were always things enough to be criticised—he would be known as a man qualified for a government post, that is, quali-

fied to deal with complicated social, economic and political problems which the common people did not know anything about and could not properly appreciate because the uneducated mind was not large enough to see the inter-relations. In other words, he was fit to belong to the ruling class, to order other people to do things by signing papers and doing nothing himself. He would resign from the professorship and 'get in'. Once he was 'in', he acquired a new point of view. By this time he was between thirty and thirty-five, married, and had two children, with a house in Nanking. He appreciated the highly complex character of bureaucracy. He had discovered that 'you really cannot do anything' in the government, that it was all very easy for outsiders to criticise the government, without knowing the human and personal elements involved in any decision, that, in fact, it was useless for outsiders to talk at all about something they did not know. But he would have a comfortable income and could afford several maids for his wife. He would either keep on his Western dress, if he was still very ambitious and dissatisfied and active, or he could discard it for the more comfortable long gown, and swing a cane if he had 'arrived'. He would exchange the writing of articles in public for private discussions and expositions in committees, the general tenor of such expositions being to show why a thing could not and must not be done. Then he would die. The highly complex social, economic, and political problems which he had thought he understood were still not understood by anybody, and went unsolved. Such was the typical life of an 'intellectual'.

Lǐ Fei had stood detached and watched this panorama of sickly and confusing and often tragi-comic events with prodigious amusement. But O-yun's predicament came to him as a rude shock, and stirred him more deeply than usual. Because he knew O-yun herself, he could not be merely amused. He was angry, and when he was angry he could not write. He was angry that such a thing could still happen. And yet nobody would say anything in the Press. He knew enough about Governor Yang and the police commissioner to understand why they did such things. He thought of the story of the capture of the famous girl entertainer Li Siangchun in Ming days. The essential picture had not changed. There were still a lot

of 'sons of eunuchs', as in the collapsing days of the Ming Dynasty.

He held in his hands a small screw and gazed at it, recalling the conversation he had had with Jo-an.

He threw the screw into the brush-pot. It was as if that little screw, a symbol of Western civilisation, hidden in that pot for holding brushes, was still bothering him.

Then he sat down and wrote his piece, entitled *Recovery of the North-West*.

"Welcome to the return of actors and actresses to Si-an!" he began. "It shows that China is a nation, one and indivisible. When the North-East is disturbed, the North-West feels its consequences vividly. Witness the events of the past fortnight."

He proceeded to categorise the events.

"March 18. An important person from the North-East arrived.

"March 27. The girl entertainer Tsui O-yun was invited by soldiers to the governor's home, and subsequently disappeared.

"March 28. A grand ball was given in honour of the important person. The Tisanlou suspended its programme.

"March 29. House-to-house search begun by the municipal police, presumably for Tsui O-yun, whose disappearance had mystified the public.

"March 30. Search continued. Actress Yao Fuyung ('Peony') left the city and cancelled her engagements. The Chunminglou was forced to suspend its performances.

"March 31. Actress Fu Chunkwei contracted a cold. Another theatre closed.

"April 1. Many things happened on this day. It was rumoured that a culprit, connected with the disappearance of O-yun, had been arrested and shot. The distinguished guest visited educational institutions and gave a lecture. There was a minor riot in Tungtachieh, where a group of soldiers tried to stop the car of the north-eastern general and demanded pay.

"April 2. The north-eastern general visited the Chungnan Hills.

"April 3. The important person left Si-an.

"April 7. Actress Yao Fuyung resumed her performances. The Chunminglou opened again.

"April 8. Actress Fu Chunkwei recovered from her cold. The

Tienwailou opened again. O-yun still has not appeared, but everybody in Si-an is happy again."

It was, considering the known facts, a fairly harmless skit that would give some satisfaction to readers, but it contained no open criticism of the authorities. The editor, who was also a native of Si-an, saw that it contained no facts that were not known to everybody in town, and he published it with a sense of gratification.

This little inventory of facts aroused a great deal of attention. The public was always glad to have something to laugh at and talk about. People who had never heard of the actresses Yao Fuyung and Fu Chunkwei took a personal interest in them and flocked to the theatres.

Li Fei had missed seeing Jo-an over the week-end because of a cold which had confined her to bed. When he was able to see her on the following Saturday, Lang and O-yun had already gone away.

It seemed such a long time since he saw her. He called her up on the telephone and found that she had got over her cold.

"Jo-an, I haven't seen you for ages. Wenpo wants to give you a dinner at the first chance, for all that you did for him and for us."

"There is no need to," Jo-an replied.

"Don't you like Wenpo?"

"It isn't that. He might get you into trouble."

"He is grateful for what you did. You really took great risks."

"Any girl would do what I did if . . ."

"If what?"

"Never mind. I just don't want you to get into any more trouble. But Lang is a good man."

"Jushui is my best friend. Jo-an, please let me see you again. Can you come out?"

Jo-an had no idea that she was being made a heroine by Li Fei's friends. But she was glad to be invited by Li Fei again.

"Yes, I will."

When they reached Fan's house, he greeted Jo-an warmly. He was seldom so hearty and appreciative.

"Miss Tu," he said, "I have had no chance to thank you. Were it not for you the other day, I could not be sure that the police wouldn't have got her."

"You could have hidden her in a trunk," said Jo-an in a jesting tone.

"Yes, but not for days. Still I would have had to get her out of the city. Now don't disparage yourself. You have put me in your debt. Will you have a cigarette?"

Jo-an took the offered cigarette, and as Li Fei lighted it he said: "I didn't know that you smoked."

"I do sometimes," said Jo-an.

"I like a girl who smokes."

"Why?"

"She gets a lot of bad air into her lungs like me, and it makes her more companionable."

Jo-an had not before smoked in company. The very act made her feel relaxed and more comfortable. She said quickly: "I smoke at home."

"Your uncle approves?"

"No. Men smoke but don't approve of women smoking. Isn't it unfair?"

Wenpo was harmed by her quiet way of saying it. "You think men are unfair to women?"

"I think so."

"It is the women's fault," said Li Fei. "They don't do things simply because men disapprove."

"It is natural. You are not a woman."

Li Fei said with a laugh: "What men don't like is to see a woman blow out smoke. You are talking with a woman, and she blows a stream of smoke into your face and you feel she is your equal. Men are always afraid of that."

"So that's the secret."

"Yes. There is a halo above a man who smokes. He expands physically. If the woman keeps on blowing, she gets the man's respect. But if she swallows her smoke, the man can ignore her."

Jo-an sent a long, steady stream of blue fumes into his face. Li Fei laughed and coughed and said: "You see. You have my full respect now."

"You are discovering it now," said Fan, eyeing the girl with animated interest.

Jo-an looked up happily at the curling smoke. "Smoke is such an idle thing," she said. "You see how beautifully it curls and

wanders about. Sometimes I sit up in bed and smoke and watch it wander and dissolve like thought itself."

Li Fei was enchanted. "You must think and dream a great deal."

"I have so much time at home alone. It is such an idle thing. You curl up in bed and get a good novel and watch the smoke when you are tired. It is idle, like your own thought made visible, wandering aimlessly. By and by it dissolves into nothing, like your thought and the story you are reading. Everything is gone. Is there anything more perfect?"

"Miss Tu," said Fan, clicking his tongue. "We must celebrate. How about having dinner with us? Do you drink, too?"

"A little," answered Jo-an nimbly.

At the restaurant, Fan drank a cup to Jo-an and said again: "I am in your debt. If there is anything I can do, do not forget that I am your friend and Li Fei's friend."

Li Fei offered Jo-an another cigarette and lighted it for her.

"Blow all you like," he said.

"And if you have thoughts, don't let them dissolve into nothing," said Fan. "We could use them."

Jo-an blew out a slow puff. Li Fei playfully sent out a puff of his own, and the smoke merged and formed a whirling pattern.

"My thoughts encounter yours. There is a meeting of the minds," said Li Fei.

She reached out her hand and waved away the smoke. "Now they have become nothing." She laughed gaily.

"You are whimsical," he said.

"No, we are just getting silly," she replied. "I will sell you all my thoughts for a dollar an ounce. Tell me, is Jushui in love with O-yun?"

"Who knows?" answered Fan. "Jushui is a queer person. He is too emotional. I think he is infatuated with her because she was in trouble."

When dinner was over, a newspaper vendor appeared at the door. Li Fei asked for a copy of the evening paper and opened it. It contained his article on the recovery of the North-West.

"What is it?" Jo-an asked when she saw him reading intently.

"I wrote something." He passed it to her, and as she read it the smile gradually died out on her face.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"No. Why did you have to write it?"

"I said nothing there. It is just a tabulation of facts which I think are amusing."

Her face was disturbed. "It may not be safe. You are making fun of the Manchurian general, and the governor may not like it."

Fan had taken the paper and was reading it. Jo-an's eyes followed him sharply. Impatiently she asked: "What do you think?"

"I suppose if the editor published it he must think it is all right."

Jo-an said to Li Fei: "If you had asked me I would not have approved your having it published. Who knows what the authorities may do?"

Li Fei was disappointed, for he had thought she would like it. She did not say anything more, and the dinner broke up rather sadly.

Li Fei called a rickshaw for her and returned to his house.

14

THE NEXT DAY LI FEI RECEIVED A TELEGRAM FROM THE Sinkungpao at Shanghai. It asked him to go up to Lanchow and, if possible, get nearer to the border. The paper was greatly pleased with his story and was interested in the Mohammedan uprising in Turkestan. In particular, the editor wanted him to follow up the career, plans, and ambitions of General Ma Chungying, the young Tungan (Chinese-Moslem) leader who had made a name for himself. The Turkestan province called Sinkiang was a closed world; it had for decades been the scene not only of racial conflicts, but, because of its geographical position, had been the subject of diplomatic negotiations among the powers. Chinese domination of the area had always been precarious. Seventy per cent of the population were Uighurs and other Turki tribes who had been there for centuries. Their subjection to Chinese suzerainty had always been dependent entirely upon the rise and fall of the Chinese regimes. It was

like a political vacuum attracting forces from without. Russian influence had been steadily gaining. Great Britain, because of the territorial propinquity to India and Tibet, wished to see the *status quo* of a semi-independent buffer state maintained. Japan was interested because of Russia's threat to Mongolia from behind. In other words, Sinkiang was a mystery, unknown and forgotten by the Chinese; but the recent Russian expansion and the exploits of Ma Chungying, threatening to create a new Moslem empire lying across Central Asia, had again focused public attention on it. In addition, the arrival of retreating troops from Manchuria had created a fresh problem threatening to upset the delicate balance of power.

Li Fei had always been attracted by the idea of exploring the new and unknown world of Chinese Turkestan. The idea of travelling among foreign tribes fascinated him. He thought he could leave Si-an alone for a while. Si-an was like a familiar friend whom he knew too well; Sinkiang was like a stranger, with the lure of the unknown. Si-an had its little domestic tragedies, but in Sinkiang he expected to see real drama, the mass conflicts of races and religions. Besides, he wanted to follow what the Manchurian troops were doing. He felt an extreme reluctance to miss seeing Jo-an just when he had discovered her, but he felt they were so absolutely right for each other—at least he was sure of his own feelings—that a temporary absence would make no difference.

He had also received a letter from Jushui telling him that he and O-yun were well and were going to Tientsin ('Celestial Waters') to join the girl's father. From there, Jushui said, he would like to take them up to Lanchow, since it would be safe for O-yun there. There were enough hints that Lang's affair with O-yun was becoming serious and that he was making long plans.

When he called Jo-an on the telephone and told her of his decision to go to Sinkiang, she was dismayed. After a while, she said: "For how long?"

"It will only be for a few months."

"When are you leaving?"

"Perhaps tomorrow."

"Please, Fei, I cannot come to you tonight. I will come tomorrow. It will have to be at six o'clock. I was planning to go

to Sunganor to see my father during the spring vacation. I was hoping you could come."

"All right, then, I'll see you tomorrow."

The next day at four o'clock Flying Whip appeared at Fan's house. Flying Whip was always happy when something exciting was happening. His black turban was wound around his head, his wide-open eyes were bright with excitement and the muscles of his face were taut.

"Grand-uncle Fan, I saw soldiers go into the Sinwanpao office and arrest a man. They took him in handcuffs. I was told he was the editor."

Fan drew a long face. "You saw it yourself?"

"I happened to be passing by. A crowd had gathered. The soldiers led a man out. I thought he might be one of your friends, so I came to tell you."

"Who told you he is the editor?"

"The people in the streets. He wore black-rimmed spectacles and his face was white as chalk. The soldiers sealed up the newspaper office after driving everybody out. Is there anything you want me to do?"

Fan thought for a quick moment and said: "No, but stay in your home. I may need you."

Fan at once went to the telephone and called up Li Fei.

"Get out of your house quickly. Yang has been arrested and the Sinwanpao is closed down. Come over as quickly as you can. Take no chances."

Li Fei hung up the telephone. It was not the first time that newspapers had been closed down, and editors had been shot. "This is it," he thought. Hurriedly he dashed out of his room, and spoke to his mother.

"Mother, the police may come here and ask for me. Tell them that I have been out of the city, in Loyang, for two days. I am going to Fan's house now. You let me know through Fan whether the police come here."

The mother's gentle face showed alarm. "My son, what has happened?"

"There is no time to explain. I cannot telephone to you. Mother, I may have to leave the city for some time. But don't worry about me."

He pressed his mother's hand, and reluctantly let it drop.

All was quiet in the alley. He ran as fast as he could through a cross-alley into the back street, got a rickshaw and went to Fan's house.

Fan looked up at him sharply.

"Flying Whip saw Yang led away in handcuffs. If you value your life, you had better get out of the city quickly. Go and see Jushui at Tienshui."

"But I cannot leave like this. I have to see Jo-an."

"Take the next train. The sooner the better."

Li Fei went to the telephone and asked for Jo-an and told her briefly what had happened.

"Jo-an, I have to leave the city at once and I must see you before I go. I must. I must."

Jo-an was stunned and speechless for a few seconds. She heard his desperate voice. "Jo-an, there is no time to lose. Can I come to your house? I cannot leave without seeing you. There is still an hour or two left."

"You come to the side gate on the west. I shall be there to let you in."

Li Fei got down from the rickshaw at some distance from Jo-an's house and walked towards it. He had never been to the Tafuti before, and he wasted some time looking for the side gate until he found it in a small alley.

Jo-an was at the gate alone. When he came near, she whispered: "Come in."

She was quivering and there was a glow of tenderness mixed with the anxiety in her deep eyes. Stealthily she closed and bolted the door. In that moment she felt Li Fei's arms enclose her. As she turned, her face was close to his looking down passionately at her. As naturally as the flower smiles back at the sun, their lips sought each other. It was their first kiss. She clung to him desperately, recklessly, then she drew away and whispered in a troubled voice: "Come inside. I will lead the way."

Blood was pounding in her face.

"I am leaving by the seven o'clock train."

Jo-an tossed her head in a gesture of fatalistic acceptance. "We have more than an hour yet."

"It must be on account of that article."

"We can't worry about it now. You must get out of the city and go where it is safe." When she pronounced the last word, her hand pressed his.

The late afternoon sun was shining upon the enclosed yard in front of her own court. A hexagonal door opened into the main court and led by a covered corridor along the wall of her aunt's room and into the moon door on the side. For the short distance of fifteen feet they might be seen.

Jo-an stopped to look in at the door with bated breath. When she saw nobody in the hall, she slipped in, motioning for him to follow her. Once in the shadow of the aunt's room, they were unobserved.

In her own court, Jo-an quickened her steps. Tangma was standing in the porch.

"Nobody will know once you are in here."

Tangma followed them into the sitting-room.

"Tangma, this is Mr. Li." Then she turned to Li Fei and said: "She is like a mother to me. You don't have to worry. You had better get acquainted."

Tangma curtsied in her northern peasant way, with more than the usual glitter in her eyes as she studied the young man whom she had heard her young mistress speak about so often. Then Jo-an said, her face relaxed: "You have never seen my home, though I have seen yours. This house was built by my grandfather."

Li Fei looked around the room. Beyond the open door was her father's room, where he could see many books and an old-fashioned cabinet. On the opposite side was Jo-an's room where an embroidered curtain covered the door.

"Tangma, you go out to the court and watch if anybody is coming."

When Tangma had gone out, she said: "What are you going to do?"

"I don't like this hurried departure, but I was planning to go up to Lanchow anyway." His eyes rested on her and then he knew how hard the parting was. "Jo-an," he said, "it is not long. I know nothing will change. It will be hard, but was sure I can come back to you." on the

"I cannot stop you if you must go. But Sinkiang is far off. I don't know when I shall see you again." Just Jo-an to

Seating himself in a chair beside her, he said: "Jo-an, we haven't much time left together. We will write to each other. I'll be thinking of you. You write me as often as you can. Nothing shall ever separate us."

His hand sought hers and imprisoned it in his grasp. He was worried whether he would be able to get his bag. The April day was lengthening and the shadows of the pear trees slanted across the flags outside.

"Jo-an, please call up Wenpo for me, will you? Ask him to let me know whether there is news from my mother and when she phones ask her to send my bag to his place."

There was still no news. They sat and waited in tense expectation.

"When I am away, please go to see my mother. You can write me news of her, because she does not write. She is simple and sincere and she will treat you like her own daughter. I have told her how much I love you."

Jo-an's eyes were fixed upon him as if in a trance, hearing and yet not hearing. She sat thinking, her lips quivering to form words. At last she said: "Fei, I want to ask you one thing, one great favour. I am going up to see my father in a week. Can you come to Sunganor and spend a few days there? Will you?"

Light returned to his eyes. "Why certainly! I can go ahead and wait for you there. It will be wonderful if we can spend a few days together before I go away."

"I want you to meet my father, too."

The telephone rang and Li Fei rushed to it. The call was from Wenpo. "Fei, I got a message from your mother. Several soldiers have come to your house and asked for you. . . . No, your mother was too frightened. It was your sister-in-law who telephoned. They told the soldiers you were away in Loyang. The soldiers searched your house. She called me after the soldiers were gone. . . . I don't think they will do anything. ~~you~~ are lucky. . . . The bag? Your sister-in-law is sending ~~to~~ my house. I shall go to the station and get the ticket. My ~~I~~ will cover the place. In case anything goes wrong, they ~~Jo-an~~ ~~a~~ you."

"We have ung up and took a deep breath. "The soldiers really ~~It must bid~~ briefly. "I was lucky to have got away."

A chill ran up Jo-an's spine as she heard this, then tears streamed down her cheeks, and she sobbed into her handkerchief.

"Don't worry," said Li Fei, trying to calm her. "They told them I was out of the city. This is the end of it."

She raised her moist eyes and said: "I will die if they ever catch you."

"I should have shown that article to you and you would have stopped me."

"I don't blame you. But if you cannot come back to Si-an, I shall leave Si-an, too. Does this mean you can never come back?"

"In a year the governor will forget all about it."

"A year! What shall I do?"

He looked into her eyes and said: "Wenpo can perhaps do something, or your father, or your uncle can speak for me. Remember that if anything happens, Wenpo and Jushui are my best friends. Go to them for advice. I shall ask Wenpo to look after you."

Tangma came and lit a lamp. Li Fei looked at his watch and said he must go.

"I will come with you."

"You mustn't."

"You go ahead. I will follow you at a distance and see that you get away safely."

She sent Tangma into the court to see that the way was clear.

Li Fei tenderly kissed Jo-an good-bye and said: "Be sure to come to Sunganor."

She promised and reluctantly let his hands go.

"Never mind me. You go ahead. I shall see you, but you will not see me."

In the gathering dusk Li Fei silently stole out of the corridor and into the front yard where Tangma was waiting.

"Look after your mistress well, Tangma," he said. "I may be away for some time."

"Do not worry. She is like my own child."

At the station, he saw Fan waiting with the bag. It was dark now, and a few ceiling lights cast a yellow glow on the crowded platform.

"I may be gone for some time, Wenpo. I entrust Jo-an to

your care. I have asked her to come and see you if she is in trouble. Will you do that for me?"

"I will do anything if she ever needs help."

Li Fei took his bag and went up to the platform. He turned around, aware that somewhere in the dark Jo-an was watching him. He raised his hand high and waved a good-bye into the night. Just before the train started moving, he thought he saw a white handkerchief waving, dimly visible at the outer edge of the lighted area. He stood in the corridor until the train chugged out of the station. Then he went to a seat and looked out of the window and watched the rows of city lights dance past. The train picked up speed, whistling a shrill warning into the night. He stood up to put his bag on the shelf over his head. It was not until he sat down again that he had time to collect his thoughts. He stroked his hard face and ran his fingers through his hair. The act struck him like a man feeling for his head after running through a volley of rifle fire. The thought amused him. Chuckling to himself, he lighted a cigarette and looked around the carriage, which was half-empty. A few harmless merchants were travelling with their families. He knew he was safe. For a moment he wondered what was going to happen to Yang. Then the whole confusing picture of his hurried good-bye to his mother and his secret meeting in Jo-an's home flashed across his mind. Around this jumble of jangling events hung a soft aroma, as of something exquisite and utterly beautiful—their first kiss, her voice, her eyes wide with fear, her weeping when she heard that soldiers had searched his house, and, above all, her suggestion that they meet at Sunganor. And this knowledge of a girl's passionate love overwhelmed his feeling of having escaped arrest. She had risked much; he was sure she would risk more. This love was like a white flame which flooded his heart with light and strangely agitated him. It was like candlelight at night, white, immaterial, impalpable and serene, but exquisitely beautiful and iridescent.

The train skirted the Wei River and pulled in at Shienyang. He slowly realised that he had left Si-an and did not know when he would be able to return. Everyone he cared for was there. He felt a twinge in his heart. He was part of the city and the city had grown up with him. At times, Si-an was like an old slattern who refused to give up her drinks and chased

out the doctors. He loved its rawness, its confusion, its mingling of modern innovations and decayed elegance, its forgotten kings' tombs and ruined places and half-buried stone tablets and abandoned historic temples and its telephone and electric lights and the clanging, chugging railway train now carrying him along. He felt sorry to leave, but without being sentimental about it. Mentally he whispered: "Good-bye, Si-an, I'll see you again!" and he smiled.

* * * * *

When Fan came out of the station he saw Jo-an slowly turning away, wiping her eyes. He went up to her and said: "Miss Tu, I did not know you were here. I hope you will come and see me if there is anything I can do for you."

He called a rickshaw for her.

She reached home a little late for supper. She had several times failed to be home for supper, and her uncle had noticed it.

"Where is she?" he asked Tangma.

"She has gone to the station to see a friend off. She will soon be back."

While dinner was served, Tu turned to his wife and said in the voice of a concerned elder: "What does it look like for a grown-up girl to be running about like a bitch in heat? What has come over her?"

"After all, she is twenty-two," Tsaiyun replied. "Don't wonder that she is interested in men."

Tu Fanglin's face was grave. "I am not going to allow this. I have a responsibility towards her father and we have the family honour to protect. When her father comes, I'd better ask him to have her married off quickly. I suggested that banker Chen's son, but she was stubborn."

"She is not our daughter. You had better leave her alone," said the aunt.

Chunmei listened quietly. "She may be in love," she said with a smile.

"How do you know?"

"I could see, that night at the ball, when she was talking with Mr. Li. And Sianghua told me that several Sundays ago she borrowed the car and went out with him."

Tsaiyun said: "If she has found a man, that is so much less worry for us. Nowadays it is not so easy to find a son-in-law. Tangma, what do you know?"

Tangma had been standing near the door watching for Jo-an's return, while listening to their conversation.

"I don't know anything. What Shiaochieh does outside I would not know."

When Jo-an came in, flushed, the conversation stopped suddenly.

"Where have you been?" said the uncle in a stern, grieved voice.

"I saw a friend off at the station." She was conscious that eyes were directed towards her, but there was a smile only on Chunmei's lips. She had hardly time to collect herself. Her thoughts were in a tumult. She wished that she did not have to appear at supper and could go off to her own room. She had dried her eyes and powdered her face before coming in, but the glow of excitement on her face was noticeable. Fluffing her hair, she sat down with a quick movement. Tsaiyun saw her swollen eyes.

"Why did you cry?"

"We are good friends," Jo-an answered readily, determined that no one should know her secret except Tangma. "She takes her vacation earlier."

Chunmei put in a word to make everybody at ease.

"It is always dramatic at the railway station. The other day I saw a mother and son parting there. The old woman literally melted into tears."

The telephone rang. Sianghua was at the other end asking for Jo-an. She had heard that the office of the evening paper had been closed and the editor arrested. She had seen the article by Li Fei. Jo-an tried to be calm and listened quietly. To Sianghua's direct question about Li Fei, she answered quickly: "If I haven't heard anything, I think he must be safe."

When Jo-an came back to the table they asked her what the call was about. She could not help a feeling of triumph that Le Fei had got away.

"The editor of the *Sinwanpao* was arrested, and the newspaper office was closed."

"What for?" asked Chunmei.

Tu Fanglin said: "It must be for that article they published the day before yesterday."

The talk went on about the flight and the return of the actresses.

"I wonder what has happened to Tsui O-yun," said Chunmei. "She has never appeared again. But what will happen to the editor?"

"He will be shot," said Tu briefly, as if it was the most natural thing. Jo-an winced. "And that writer will be shot, too."

"Do you think he should be shot?" Jo-an glanced quickly at her uncle, although she was struggling hard to conceal her emotions.

"I don't say that. But he will be. You know the governor. And it will be his own fault, too. Young men like to teach us elder people how to run a government. Wait till tomorrow. Unless someone speaks for the editor to the governor, some soldiers will put a bullet through his head."

"I don't think the governor is right. We want our women and girls to be safe," said Tsaiyun. "Who wants his daughter to be kidnapped? When the Manchurian arrived, the city was like a poultry yard broken into by a fox. The editor meant well. You ought to speak for him."

"We'll hear all about it in the papers tomorrow," remarked the uncle curtly.

Jo-an was glad she had personally seen Li Fei get out of danger. When her uncle said that Li Fei would be shot, the word seemed to stab her ears. She had not quite realised how narrowly Li Fei had escaped. She exulted inwardly with a feeling that any sacrifice on her part would be worth the price of his escape.

Once back in her room, her head reeled. She saw the chair where Li Fei had sat only an hour ago. She was so glad she had taken the risk and seen him off. Then she remembered that his mother must be worried. She went to the telephone and asked for Mrs. Li, and told her that she had personally seen him get safely into the train. "Mrs. Li, your son is safe. I shall have the chance to see him in a week and you can send any message to him. I will come to see you before I go."

She felt so much better when she had done this. She had

an exciting talk with Tangma and then went to bed. Her head was in confusion, floating with excitement. For the first time they had kissed each other, and for the first time he had come to her house. Thoughts, images, fears, love, plans for the future crowded into her young brain. Foremost among her thoughts was the trip to Sunganor, where she would be able to spend a short week entirely alone with him—a precious short week before he should leave for far away.

She said to herself that she would be cheerful, she would leave all worries behind, so that while he was in Sinkiang he could look back upon an unforgettable week and remember her by it. It was possible that her uncle would hear about it afterwards, but she did not care. There were few things in this world she cared about, and she did care about Li Fei's love. They would go up to the lamasery and Li Fei would meet her father. How would her father like Li Fei? Would they have time to become engaged?

The next morning the papers came out with the news that the *Sinwanpao* had been closed down and that its editor, Yang Souho, had been shot. The summary shooting was a surprise to many people. The governor must have had some special reason for acting so quickly. When an editor was imprisoned, there was hope that somebody might intercede for him and he might be let out later on condition of 'repentance', which meant changing the tone of his editorials. The official paper gave out the reasons for the action: one, that Yang had proved himself to be 'anti-government' and 'disrespectful to the authorities', and two, that 'in times of national trouble, Yang was guilty of spreading rumours to disturb men's hearts and shake the people's confidence in the government'.

The governor had had nothing to do with the official charges of crime. He had just given the order to shoot Yang. When he was first shown Li Fei's article, he rather liked it himself and was amused. He mentioned the article to his wife at dinner. She read it and her face changed.

"You cannot allow this sort of thing to go on. It must be stopped. People are making fun of you."

"I don't see why they may not have some fun," said the governor good-naturedly.

"Do you suppose the general will like it? If you don't stop

this once for all, you may want to be sworn brother to him, but he will not be sworn brother to you."

"What must I do?"

"You are a governor and you don't know what you must do! I think you are really getting old. Do something drastic, and the general will be convinced that you are sincere."

That night the governor sent for the prisoner, who was brought into his presence trembling and handcuffed.

"What do you mean by publishing that nonsense?"

"I published only the facts, Your Excellency. They are known to everybody."

"Who told you to publish the facts? Has a newspaper nothing better to do? You run your newspaper and I run my government. Now you want to teach me how to run my government."

"I would not dare to, Your Excellency."

"Yes, you do. Come on. You take my place. I have enough troubles." He stood up, stroking his broad face. "Come on. Sit down there and see if you like it. I make you governor."

"Your Excellency, I apologise. . . . I have offended Your Excellency."

The governor came close to Yang, his narrow eyes glinting. "So you wouldn't dare. You wouldn't dare take that seat. I offer you the governorship. Why don't you take it?"

"Governor Yang, I never meant anything disrespectful to the government. Our women were not safe. . . ."

"Don't lecture me. I know what I am doing!" The governor's sharp, brutal grin suddenly disappeared. He drew himself up, threw his head back and bawled to the aide: "Take him out and have him shot!" and went back to his chair, roaring with laughter.

* * * * *

A few days later, having heard from Li Fei of his safe arrival at Tienshui, Jo-an went to see his mother. She found her in bed, sick with worry about her son. Jo-an was taken into the mother's room by Tuanerh. The elder brother, Li Ping, was there, too, and Jo-an was introduced to him for the first time.

Mrs. Li sat up and drew back the bed-curtain and patted on the bed for her to sit down. Without the black band around,

her head, her white hair was visible. Jo-an saw that she was older than she had thought when she had seen her for the first time. The quiet, white face looked anxiously at her.

"Miss Tu, have you news of my son?"

"He has arrived at Tienshui. It is in another province and he is safe. I am going to see him and will take anything you want to send him."

The mother looked at her gratefully and said: "My son has got into this trouble. I am an old woman and cannot do anything for him. Tell him to take good care of himself and eat properly. Tell him that these are his mother's words. I do not know if I can see him again." She took out a handkerchief and wiped her eyes.

"I will tell him all that you say. He has to hide away for a time, but after a while the affair will be forgotten. His friends, or perhaps my uncle, can speak for him and then he can return home."

"Miss Tu, you are a good girl. If you can help to bring my son back to me, I shall be grateful."

The mother put out her hand and patted Jo-an's shoulder. Jo-an felt all weak inside. She had not felt a mother's touch for years. Suddenly she threw herself upon the bed and wept piteously. The mother knew then that this girl loved her son greatly, though she would not permit herself to say it.

It was now the mother's turn to give comfort, and her kind hands stroked the young girl as she lay sobbing.

"Jo-an, I liked you from the first day I saw you. You must not regard yourself as an outsider. It will make me happier if you will come here more often for my son's sake."

Jo-an looked at the white-faced dignified old woman who was the mother of the young man she loved, and her heart warmed.

"I will," she answered.

Tuanerh had gone out to make tea, and after the tea they all sat together and the mother asked many questions about Jo-an's own father and mother. Then Li Ping gave her a letter for his brother, telling him the names of the shops in Tienshui and Lanchow where he might have money advanced to him if he was in need. Tuanerh brought a parcel of Li Fei's gowns and shoes for her to take to him.

Jo-an felt the peculiar warmth of this simple family, the kind mother and the contented daughter-in-law. As she took a rickshaw home, holding the parcel containing Li Fei's clothing, a feeling of pride welled up in her that his family had accepted her, that she was not alone.

When she arrived home, Tangma said: "A letter from your father has come," and fetched it from the table. Jo-an tore it open and read it while Tangma looked on anxiously.

"It is another letter asking me to go to him. He has not been feeling well." She bit her lips. "My father really should not live up in the lamasery. If he is ill, he should come back here and see good doctors."

At supper she spoke about her father's illness and showed the letter to her aunt and uncle.

"I wish I could start at once," Jo-an said, evident excitement in her face.

"If he cannot leave the lamasery you will have to go up to Dingkor Gumpa to see him. Do you want me to send somebody with you?" said the uncle.

"There is no need. Ah-San will take me."

Tu Fanglin's silence meant acquiescence and Jo-an felt relieved.

"His ginseng may be used up by this time," said Chunmei. "We sent him some on *Shangyuan* festival. The other day the Chen family sent us ten ounces of Korean ginseng of the best quality. If he is coughing, tomorrow I will get some Szechuan shuti roots and Yushu oil for Third Aunt to take along. I don't like the idea of a man over fifty living alone up in a Tibetan lamasery. He should not treat his illness as a joke."

"My brother is stubborn," said Tu Fanglin. "But, Jo-an, as his daughter, you ought to persuade him to come back."

"I will do my best."

The next day Chunmei brought a package of medicines to Jo-an and said: "Third Aunt, you will take these to him, but I don't feel comfortable about it. Who is going to stew the medicines for him? Even if he has temple servants, it is not like our home. And who knows if he will take them regularly?"

Jo-an felt really grateful. "I will try my best to persuade him."

Chunmei came closer and Jo-an felt her eyes studying her.

"I heard that the police were looking for Mr. Li and that he has escaped. I hope he has. I was worried because I know he is your friend."

Jo-an flushed. "So I have heard," she answered briefly.

"Third Aunt, I am not joking with you. What girl of your age is not thinking of a home and marriage? The other night at the ball, when I saw Mr. Li talking with you, I thought to myself, he would be a good man for you. We are women and I am speaking frankly what is in my mind. It is time that your father arranged a good match for you."

Jo-an was perplexed. Her aunt had never bothered to speak to her like this. She did not know whether to make Chunmei an ally. She would be a powerful ally.

"Matches are made in heaven," Jo-an replied noncommittally.

"I just want you to know that I want to be of help. You look at our family. It looks good on the outside. Second Uncle lives apart and your father and the old man don't get along with each other. People look at the Tafuti and count the grandchildren and it does not look like a big prosperous family as it should be. You ought to persuade your father to come back. It will be more like a family. I don't know what you think of me. I came here as a maid. What could I do? I was a girl like you. When Tsu-en came along, my rice was cooked. I couldn't do a thing about it. People might think I am ambitious. I am not saying this of myself, but when a girl becomes a mother, her first thought is for her son. So I stayed. And then I could not leave the family and did the best I could. To deal with such a big house is not an easy matter. If I had not made a fight the other night, I could not even be buried in the family cemetery under a Tu tombstone."

Never had anyone spoken to Jo-an on matters so close to her heart. Chunmei, of all people, an outsider elevated by her own effort into a 'daughter-in-law', felt more loyal to the Tu family than Sianghua, the true daughter-in-law. Chunmei thought and felt for the Tu family as she herself did.

"You really should have your name inscribed with Tsu-en and Tsutseh on the eldest brother's tombstone, to put it beyond all legal dispute."

"I have thought of that already. I don't like to think what will become of this family ten years from now, when the old

people are gone. You are born a Tu, I am not. But I say that family fortunes depend entirely upon the women. We are wealthy, I know. But if the rich always remain rich, the poor will never have a chance. These things are all in the stars. I won't dare to say that things may never change. What I want to see is a spirit of harmony in the family. I have said too much already. My only thought is that you should persuade your father to come home, and when you have a husband, you can still live in the family with your father. The brothers are both stubborn. It is up to us to see that they are reconciled."

Jo-an was greatly touched by the sincerity and the thoughtfulness of this woman.

"I will tell you something," she said. "That night at the ball, I was told by my uncle to call you Saotse (sister-in-law). I did it because I was told. Now I really think of you in my heart as my Saotse. You are thinking more of the family than the men."

"Men are simpletons," said Chunmei with a rueful smile. "Is there anything else you want to tell me?"

Jo-an's heart opened towards Chunmei, and she said: "Yes. I am in love with Li Fei."

15

THE SNOWS OF THE OSA TAKIT HAD MELTED AND SWOLLEN THE Sunganor lake. Li Fei arrived alone, and went up to the Sunganor house and found only the servant couple living in it. He told them that he came from Si-an and was on his way to see their master at the lamasery, and that Miss Tu herself would be coming.

Set in an eastern spur of the Minshan mountains in South Kansu, the Sunganor lake was an expanse of placid water, bordered on the south by massive rocky headlands coming down to the edge, and on the other three sides by a long line of low, bare, red hills. A river ran from the lake along an undulating valley to its north-west, connecting with the old Taochow, where Governor Tu Heng used to have his office. The Sunganor house, hidden in a southern recess, enclosed by

the headlands, was half a mile up a slope. Behind it lay a wild jungle leading to the swamps on the other side of the slope. Inaccessible from the east except by a narrow mountain trail along a deep ravine, and laid at the foot of the Minshan where the streams ran northward to join the Tao River, the lake was like a hidden jewel of turquoise that few people knew about. The population thereabout was largely Moslem, for it marked the southern limit of the large area of Moslem population which spread from Taochow all the way to the north. The Minshan mountain itself was inhabited by the aboriginal tribes of Kiangs and Lolos and Tibetans who had come here from farther down south. In Governor Tu Heng's days it served as a beautiful retreat where the grandfather used to come and spend his holidays, a beautiful and costless toy wanted by nobody. The land was practically valueless, since no Chinese would think of settling in this remote area, cut off from the prosperous communities in the east of the province. Since Jo-an's uncle had turned this useless toy into a source of family wealth by developing the salt fish industry, a busy fishing village had grown up. This village and the distant Mohammedan hamlets on the northern shore, some three miles across, gave the region the only touch of human habitation.

Standing on the wide porch of the ancestral home, Li Fei had a curious feeling. The house was a one-storeyed stone building, plastered on the inside, with a long parlour in the centre and rooms on both ends. Massive exposed beams stretched across the ceiling of the hall. On the inner wall hung a portrait of General Tso-Tsungtang in his mandarin hat and costume and high satin boots. He had a full, round face of great dignity and a black drooping moustache, and wore his fingernails at least two inches long. The high cabinets and massive furniture all told of a generation now gone and forgotten.

The wide porch paved with flags looked out on the lake below over a winding walk partly covered by hedges of thorn bush that had been left uncut for years. Below lay the fishing village, a long series of brick buildings, with fishing-boats lying ashore, clustering around a jetty. The dark brown nets were hung up in stacks to dry in the sun. Some village children were playing on the road behind the village. The fishermen's wives were cleaning the morning's haul along the shore up towards

the long straight building to the east. A line of willows trailed their soft bending branches in pale green and gold around the curving eastern shore, now in the shadow of the brown crags which rose some three hundred feet from the lake level. 'Surmounting the crags, covered with a thin coating of green, stood a loan giant *tsingo* tree, spreading its branches like a parasol. On the left, the swollen lake had partly submerged the rocky footpath near the water. A ridge extended from the mountains behind to the edge of the water, shutting out the Moslem village on the other side and forming another headland surmounted by a pine grove where egrets made their nests. The wind whistled through the grove standing in the sun and made a singing which could be heard from the house. Near-by, in the southern inlet, the water was deep dark green below the cliffs, shading into a turquoise blue and purple where the lake widened, an effect created by the light of the red loess hills on the opposite shore. All around the near-by hills the rich vegetation came dressed in different shades of green, darkening towards the heavy jungle in a recess of the eastern ridge, while here and there tall white poplars and ashwood and maples smiled on the mountain slopes along with red berries on the grassy meadows. There was no wall, because the governor had hated the idea of an enclosure and because, as far as the eye could see across the lake, the entire region was his property.

Idling on the porch in the afternoon, Li Fei constantly looked up at the eastern ridge. Jo-an should be coming that way as he himself had come.

"*Shiaochieh* should be here now if she leaves *Tienshui* early," said Ah-San. "They usually arrive about this time."

He went down the slope and followed the country path behind the fishing village and turned into the rocky trail which led up to the *tsingo* tree some two miles away from the house. He stopped below the tree and waited. On the other side of the ridge lay a wild valley with a wood in the centre by a rocky stream. He would be able to see Jo-an coming from the distance.

Soon he saw a moving dark red object emerging around the wood. He was sure it was Jo-an. She was riding on a black mule, while a man walked by the side of the animal. When

he could discern the red sweater and the small girlish figure, he hallooed and waved his arms frantically, and the figure waved an arm in return. His heart pounded violently. He started to run down to meet her. It was too good to be true, meeting her in this deserted valley. He felt that an invisible force was tying them together. How Jo-an dared!

"Jo-an! Jo-an!" he cried when he was within fifty yards.

Her face was red from the exertion of riding and her hair fluffed and flounced as she approached. He saw her mule stop. Jo-an sprang down from her saddle lightly and ran with quick steps towards him. Before he knew it, she had hidden her face in his breast. He felt embarrassed before the muleteer, who was watching and smiling, but Jo-an raised her head and looked at him and said with joy in her dancing eyes: "At last, Fei!"

He held her for a second. "Jo-an! I dared not believe it."

"Didn't you think I would keep my promise?"

"I did. But I dared not hope—dared not believe——" Then he relaxed and said: "Anyway, you are here. It is too good to be true."

She turned and walked by his side while the muleteer followed.

"Did you see my mother?" he asked.

"Yes. I have brought a parcel she sent for you. Fei, I have so many things to tell you. I don't know how to begin."

"Don't. It's so good to have you. You don't know how happy I am."

Hand-in-hand they went up the ridge. At the top they rested. Jo-an was panting, out of breath, but her face was exuberant. The muleteer came up from behind, urging the mule by patting its flanks.

"You go ahead," said Li Fei to the driver, who went on, leading the animal by the bridle slowly down the rocky path. Then Jo-an felt Li Fei's arms around her and she let her head rest against his shoulder, her chest heaving. She felt Li Fei's breath close upon her.

He guided her to a rock in the shade. There was a stiff mountain wind and Jo-an sat leaning forward looking with distant eyes upon the lake below. The water below the cliffs was now a deep green, rippling in a moving pattern when the breeze passed over it. Towards the north-west, on their right, partly

hidden by a precipice, was the dam below which a wide riverbed ran towards the valley.

Jo-an was quiet, and bent her head, looking down at her feet.

"What are you thinking of?"

"About your going away." She took up a handful of loose gravel and let it drop slowly through her fingers.

"You won't worry about me, will you?" His hand closed upon hers and imprisoned it. She swung her body towards him.

"You are the most precious thing I have in this world," he whispered, and kissed her passionately. Her eyes were closed and her lips were open. As he fingered her small ear-lobe, her eyes opened and she murmured: "Are you safe, Fei?"

"Yes, of course I am safe."

She sat up, her hair falling over her shoulders. "You have heard that Yang was shot?"

"Yes. I read it in a Tienshui paper."

"Are you sure you can take care of yourself?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Don't worry about me. You don't know about women, do you?"

"Perhaps I don't."

Jo-an stood up and adjusted her crumpled sweater.

There was a sharp descent and then the road gradually levelled off.

"My father is sick," she said. "We must go up to see him—tomorrow."

She walked very straight, half a foot shorter than Li Fei. The air coming from the sun-baked meadows smelled of myrtle and pine. A group of villagers and their children, learning of their arrival, had come out on the road to watch them. Jo-an exchanged greetings with them.

"I used to catch crayfish here when I was a child," she said. "There was a Moslem boy, a year older than I. We used to go into the shallow waters. He was a very good swimmer, and while I was fishing he went playing about in the water, jumping from rock to rock, completely naked. When a fish bit, I used to call to him for help, and he would plunge into the water and swim towards the boat and help me wrench the hook out of the fish and put another worm on it. I don't see Tantse

around here any more. Every time I come to the Sunganor, I think of those childhood days with Tantse."

"Tantse. That is an odd name."

"He was a Moslem boy. His parents had been killed when White Wolf, the leader of a rebellion, ransacked and burned the villages and towns along his path. He was only six then. My father found him in Taochow and brought him here. He could not speak a word of Chinese. The first word he learned was *tan* (egg), and he was so delighted with it that he kept repeating it. So it became his name."

With sprightly steps Jo-an went up the garden path leading to the porch. Old flower-pots stood against the wall with no flowers in them. A huge magnolia tree stood near the hedge entrance with its deep green leaves and brown buds. The garden was overgrown with weeds and looked desolate.

"Nobody ever comes to live here now," Jo-an said, almost apologetically. "The garden is not cared for properly."

Tasao, Ah-San's wife, was standing in the porch. "*Shiaochieh*, you have come back."

"Yes, I haven't been here for a whole year." Her voice was gay when she said to the woman: "You have met Mr. Li. We are engaged to be married." The woman's eyes dwelt on Li Fei's lean figure for a moment and said: "Why, *Shiaochieh*, Mr. Li did not tell me!" He had no time to be embarrassed, though his eyes blinked at Jo-an.

"Come in, Fei," she said, like a proud hostess. She took out some money and told Ah-San to pay the mule-driver. After Ah-San went out and his wife had gone into the kitchen, Jo-an opened her luggage and took out the parcel that Li Fei's mother had sent through her.

"There," she said, her face beaming with the feeling that she had accomplished an important domestic mission.

"Why did you introduce me like that?" Li Fei exclaimed.

"Be quiet," she said under her breath. "You will understand why."

Tasao brought out a basin of water and put it on a big old oak table against the wall.

While Jo-an washed she went on talking, like a happy hostess upon the coming of a favourite guest. She pointed to General

Tso Tsungtang's portrait, and asked Li if he liked fishing, and if he had seen grandfather's room at the top. She went over to the oval mirror on a side wall and said, while powdering her face: "Come, I will show you the house."

She opened the eastern room facing the front, with a private porch which commanded a view of the eastern side of the lake. Directly below was a hillside covered with ashwood and brush. Pointing to the solitary *tsingo* tree, she said:

"We call it the Sentinel. The moon comes up over there. I usually sleep in this room when I come."

She leaned on the balcony in high spirits.

"I want so much for you to like this place, because I like it here. You can come here and write. And I will sit by your side and not disturb you and you will write beautiful things and I shall want nothing else."

"You will be bored with me," he said jokingly.

Jo-an's hand covered his mouth. "You mustn't say that."

"Really you want nothing else to be contented?"

"Well, I want my father to be living with us, too."

They were interrupted by Tasao.

"*Shiaoichieh* and *kuyeh*, the noodles are ready."

He was embarrassed to be called *kuyeh*, the servant's address for a prospective bridegroom. He glanced at Jo-an in misery and she broke out into loud laughter.

Such was the beginning of their short and happy stay at Sunganor. While they were there, Jo-an's anxieties were all forgotten in the happiness of the immediate present. For a few days they were to be together and she wanted these to be days they would not forget. She followed him everywhere, never let him out of her sight, and exerted herself to please him. She ruthlessly shut out the thought that in a little time he would be gone far away.

"Do you want to go down to look at the fishing village?"

"But you must be tired after riding all day."

"No, I am not tired." She spoke as if she had an inexhaustible supply of energy for these days.

Hand-in-hand they walked down towards the bank.

"You understand why I had to introduce you as my fiancé? We'll be here several days and it will be easier this way."

"I do," he said, but he was amazed at her daring. They had

never spoken about betrothal or marriage, but he realised that they had never questioned it. Technically she had lied to the servants. She must want them to treat them like fiancés.

In the distance the late afternoon sun was shining upon the red hills on the north shore.

"I used to come down this lane barefooted," she said, leaning against him.

"Barefoot?"

"Yes, I was dressed as a boy. My father had wanted a boy. We must go to see my father tomorrow. My spring vacation will be finished in another eight days."

"Jo-an, we must also spend a day at Tienshui. I saw Lang and O-yun there. They are planning to go up to live at Lanchow with her father."

They went towards the shore where the fishermen's wives were mending the nets, while the fishermen were smoking their pipes. In the distance to the north a bank of white haze had settled.

They followed the edge of the lake and saw the long row of brick buildings, with ventilation-holes close under the roofs, where the fish were prepared and stored. Jo-an told him that the fishermen would go out at dawn for their morning catch and come back about breakfast-time. Then the wives would go out and clean the fish, keeping the scales and entrails for their vegetable gardens. Then they salted and smoked them and hung them on long lines along the meadow close to the shore. So the dew entered into the flesh and the crisp air and the sun dried them, hardening them into a proper brown. That was why Sunganor fish were so delicious, that in them were the flavour of the sun and the air and the dew of this region.

In the gathering dusk, when crows circled in the air and egrets came to roost in the pine forest on top of the stony cliffs, the villagers saw the two figures, a man and a girl, arms around each other's waists, slowly going up the land towards the ancestral house, and the villagers knew that they were lovers.

Tasao had prepared a delicious boiled perch, and under the oil lamp the two of them ate their supper, happy to be so far from the turmoil of the world.

Afterwards they went out to sit on the porch. After a while Jo-an said: "We can see the moon come up better on my side."

When they came in the table had been cleared, and Tasao asked them: "Hot water is ready. Will *kuyeh* and *shiaochieh* have your foot-bath now or later?"

Jo-an knew that the people in the mountains went to bed early and that Tasao was anxious to have her duties done, the foot-bath being the usual custom in the north-west before one retired to bed.

"We will have it now," she said.

When her foot-bath was done, Jo-an said to Tasao: "Bring the tea into my room. We shall not be going to bed yet. I shall not need you and you can lock up and go."

Tasao brought in the tea and said: "*Shiaochieh*, you should retire early, too, if you are going to see your father tomorrow."

"Never mind, Mr. Li and I have things to talk over yet. Has *kuyeh* finished yet?"

"Yes, he is dressing."

Jo-an went into her own room and through the wall she heard Li Fei's steps. Soon he came out into the parlour, fully dressed in a new gown.

"Do you think it is all right to see your father tomorrow in this?" he asked.

She surveyed him carefully and said: "My father is very fastidious. He is the old type, you know. You have to sit erect and you must not slouch or put your legs up when talking to him. He judges people by the way they stand and walk."

"I shall be nervous."

"You needn't." She threw a happy glance at him. "But why do you dress up now?"

"I thought we wanted to talk a while."

"Come into my room, then. I have told Tasao to lock up. There's tea if you want it."

The night was quiet except for the insects chirping in the grass. Jo-an arranged two low chairs against the window. She poured a cup of tea for him and said: "Do you want a blanket to wrap up your feet?"

"No, thank you. Strangely, this mountain air makes me drowsy."

"We can talk tomorrow if you are tired."

"Never mind about me. You must rest, too. Come, sit down beside me."

Jo-an sat with her body straight, her eyes looking up at him. "Isn't it wonderful—it is so peaceful and quiet here—and we are all by ourselves."

"You make me feel as if I am moving about in a dream." He stretched a hand and grasped hers, and she let their hands lie in her lap.

The insects' drone became louder and the perfume of the night air came into the room. After a while Li Fei's eyelids began to droop, his head reclining easily. Jo-an did not stir. She would have held her breath if she could. The lamplight revealed his sharp profile. She was so happy that against her will tears formed in her eyes. She would not withdraw her hand to wipe them away for fear of waking him, and she felt the drops rolling and stopping and continuing down her cheeks. Then she felt his clasp relax and withdrew her hand, silently stole up from her chair and turned the lamp low. Then she took a blanket and gently covered his outstretched legs. She sat and watched him and she was proud and content.

A three-quarter moon slowly came up above the crag and bathed the valley in mellow silver light. The lines of Li Fei's chin and his sensitive mouth were beautiful to her. She got up again to put out the lamp and just as silently sat down again. In doing so, her foot knocked against Li Fei and he woke up.

"Why, I have fallen asleep!" He looked up at the moon and asked: "How long have I been asleep?"

"About ten minutes."

"Ten minutes only? I had a long and pleasant dream."

"What did you dream about?"

"I have forgotten. I only remember it was pleasant."

"Do you want some tea?"

"I will get it. You wrapped the blanket around me while I was asleep!"

He got up and poured himself a cup of tea and handed her another. Then he drew his chair close to her and they sat for a moment looking at the moon. They heard the howl of some night-prowling animal, and then the night was silent again.

Feeling the cold air, Li Fei took the blanket and covered her and put his arm around her, and she snuggled comfortably against his chest.

"I remember now what I dreamed," he said. "I was walking

with you on a hillside full of flowers. You picked some petals and put them in your mouth. I said you should not, but you laughed and ate them. Then I followed your example and we both laughed. Our baby . . .”

“Baby?”

“Yes, our baby. He was about two years old, and his plump legs were toddling along on the meadow. I went after him and took him back and I gave him flower petals to eat. You were angry and we had a quarrel. Then you took the baby and dug the petals out of his mouth. Then we made up.”

“He was a boy?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know who is the happiest person I know?”

“I.”

“I am not talking about ourselves. You guess. Somebody we both know.”

Li Fei ran his mind over the people he knew. None of them could be called happy.

“I can’t guess. I don’t know.”

“Shall I tell you? It’s Tuanerh. She is perfectly content. She has a good husband and her sweet children and such a wonderful mother-in-law.”

“Perhaps you are right. I never thought of it.”

“That is what a woman wants above all things, a home like hers. Sianghua is very unhappy. I have seen many marriages and they frighten me. Love can be such a beautiful thing.”

“Yes, love can be beautiful.”

“Fei, we shall never quarrel and we shall never change. Whatever you want me to be, that I will be to you. Tell me, how does a man feel when he is in love?”

“He feels that everything about her is right, and she is all he wants. Then he wants to protect her, to keep her from all harm. That is how I feel towards you. It makes me afraid that something might happen to you. Will you take good care of yourself when I am gone?”

She rubbed her hair against his face and laughed. “I can stand anything if I have your love. My only fear is to lose you. A woman can trudge in snow without shivering when she is in love.”

Half her face was in the shadow. He held her small, vibrant

body against him, and felt its gentle warmth. He had not realised until this moment how deeply this girl loved him. It was to him a discovery of the mysteries of a woman's heart. He would be going away in a few days. This was what Sunganor meant, why she had invited him—to be alone with him, and why she had introduced him as her fiancé. His arms tightened around her. For a moment he was quiet, his heart heavy with the thought of parting for a long time. . . .

* * * * *

The moonlight retreated across the threshold of the balcony door and the spring night was silent outside. The distant drone of insects ceased, and the lake and the valley were asleep. Fireflies flickered like wandering stars and wove patterns of light among the trees.

From their pillows they saw the stars above the crag, so close that they could reach out and touch them, twinkling like eternal riddles, not shaming them, but beaming at them.

"Whenever I see those stars again, I shall think of you and of this night," said Jo-an.

In that moment she was a woman. Li Fei's head was clear and he lay looking at the stars, flickering and serene, and touched the dim, warm body of the girl, her head to one side, and he felt tender towards this small and daring girl who had given herself to him like a shower of light.

"You had better get up and have a good sleep," she said. "We have a long journey tomorrow."

He obeyed and got up and tucked the quilt under her neck. Her white, oval face and her dark, glowing eyes were visible in the dim light. He bent over and kissed her and felt her hot breath.

"That is how much I love you," she whispered.

"Does it matter?"

"It does not matter."

As he left her, he saw a calm and contented smile upon her face.

* * * * *

Jo-an woke when the cold white light of the sun shone into her room, casting irregular shadows on the floor. She sat up

and looked at the chairs against the porch window. Her hands crossed behind her head, she tried to think and to remember. A smile crept to her lips. Had she known that it would happen? Had she wanted it? She did not know what to think. She had only followed the biddings of her heart. When she had invited him to come here, she had thought only of spending a few wonderful days with him. She had given herself completely in the surrender of love, and she did not regret it. She listened for noises in the next room. It was silent. She rapped the wall lightly and did not hear anything.

She got up and called for the jug and basin.

"Is Mr. Li up?"

"Kuyeh is up early, walking about the garden."

The word kuyeh, suggesting the bridegroom of the family, sounded good in her ears.

She washed hastily and put on a pair of quilted drawers, for she knew that it would be cold on the way to the lamasery. Looking into an old cracked mirror, she saw her glowing eyes and drew a carnation line across her lips. She selected a pair of round coral ear-rings and put them on and hoped he would like them. She thought of Sianghua and of her class-mates and considered herself lucky. This day she was going to see her father with Li Fei, and she was proud of him. It was the way Li Fei stood and carried himself and that bright sparkle in his eye. When he talked, his words always dazzled her a little. For he there was not a young man in the whole of Si-an who had his brilliance of mind. She turned and saw the half-empty cups of cold tea on the small table. Outside, the shore was already busy with the fishermen coming back from their morning trip. She was almost amazed that they went on as usual and that the sentinel which had watched their love in the night seemed not to care.

She heard a knock at the door and went to open it. Li Fei was there in his heavy blue gown. He put his hands on her shoulders as if he wanted to kiss her. She winked at him, swiftly glancing over his shoulder at Tasao, who was bringing in the breakfast. She threw the door wide open and said: "Come and look at the fishermen coming in." Stepping past the chairs in the doorway, they went out to the porch. She was pointing at the shore when he interrupted her and pressed a kiss on her

forehead. She felt it like a bridegroom's kiss in the morning and was happy.

They had their porridge and got ready to start at about ten o'clock. Jo-an had a woollen muffler thrown around her neck.

Two Tibetan ponies, engaged by Ah-San, stood ready in the garden. The Tibetan drivers wearing their pointed caps were in their sheepskin robes and soft leather boots. The sheepskin, serving as their garment in the day and their blanket at night, was carelessly tied around the waist, and thrown over one shoulder with its long sleeve hanging to the knee, baring the other arm and shoulder. Of medium height, their faces tanned and muscular, they resembled the Chinese of Szechuen.

The day was clear and calm. Masses of white clouds bumped sluggishly across the sky. They headed up the eastern ridge and turned in the direction of the Osa Takit in the south. The journey of twenty miles led over three passes, alternating with heavy forests and grassy plateaus. Between long stretches of uninhabited mountains they saw, here and there, Tibetan encampments and bearded black yaks grazing idly. A dangerous gorge marked the interval between the second and the third pass where the wind sucked through the gorge and whistled by the rocky precipices. Pheasants abounded, for the Tibetans' religion forbade them to shoot birds. When they killed a yak for its meat and skin, they first said a prayer for its soul. No Chinese lived in these mountains. The Tibetans, who had come here about a century ago, had fled from the region of Tashi Lhunpo because of their religion. Whole tribes disappeared and came north rather than give up their ancient religion. They belonged to the Red or 'unreformed' sect, governed in all matters by their lamas.

They stopped for a short rest before the climb up the third pass. The drivers led their horses to a mountain brook for a drink, while they took out their pipes and smoked. Li Fei chose a rock near the stream, where he and Jo-an sat, propping their backs against it.

"Do you like my ear-rings?"

"They are charming on you."

"I put them on today for you. I want to remember everything we do together on this trip. It is so short. I have to be back for Monday. You will like the lamasery, but we can stay

only one day there and the day after tomorrow we have to come back."

He looked up at the sky and the wide spaces. Behind them the jungle land lay hidden by the gorge from which they had come, while the bare rocky peaks lay in the sun towards the south. Except for the two Tibetan drivers, they were the only human beings in the whole visible scene.

"What would you do if your father disapproved of me?" Li Fei asked.

She answered quickly: "I know he will. I am his daughter and he cannot see me broken-hearted. He will, but he is an old man and he is ill. Fei, I beg you, please do not contradict him, for my sake. It is not easy for him to like young people of this generation. He won't even talk with Tsujen. You are brilliant, but we are both young. We can listen."

Li Fei saw the anxiety in her eyes. "Is he so hard to please?"

"No, but our ideas are different. I am just anxious. And after all, he is a scholar and worthy of our respect."

"Don't worry, then. I promise."

"And another thing. He likes a man with the old etiquette. It is because I want him to approve of you that I am telling you this."

The drivers came and said that they must go. "If you want to be there before sunset, we have to start."

Li Fei held out his hand for her to mount the pony and swung on to the saddle himself. Distances were deceptive in those regions. When they reached the top of the last pass it was already five o'clock.

Li Fei was confronted with a view of such majesty and pristine beauty that he stood spellbound as before something new, strange, and beyond the imagination of men. They were eleven thousand feet above sea level. The bluish-white head of the Osa Takit shimmered in the sun while, below, its shoulders were smothered in fleecy white clouds. Far beyond towards the western horizon stretched layers upon layers of greenish-blue ranges which were the Minshan mountains. But most striking of all was the lamasery building itself, a white edifice rising like a fortress, sitting like a crown upon a hill against the mottled green and deep brown of the slope. The whole valley was like an enchanted dreamland. All was as if the earth had freshly

left the hand of its Creator, unspoiled and untouched yet by the hand of man. The daring white palatial lamasery, rising some five hundred feet from the bridge at the bottom of the valley, the only human structure in sight, far from detracting from the majesty of nature around it, was more like a hymn to the glory of the human spirit and a tribute to the unscalable peaks beyond. At its top, the temple's golden roofs were glittering in the sun. Just as Li Fei thought he had come to the end of civilisation, lost in an uninhabited wilderness of bare rocky peaks, he saw what the spirit and labour of the Tibetan tribesmen had created. He had heard of the golden images and temples with golden roofs of Kumbum and Labrang farther north, but he had not expected to find them here.

16

TU CHUNG KNEW THAT HIS DAUGHTER WOULD COME WHEN HE sent for her.

The winds of fate and circumstance had swept this man into self-exile at Dingkor Gumpa in the heart of the Minshan mountains. He would not admit it to himself, or to anybody, even his own daughter, that it was a self-exile, that he had gone off in a protest against and in grand contempt for what he saw in Si-an and in his own home. He did enjoy the lamasery as a retreat for contented seclusion. He had often written to tell Jo-an how much he enjoyed the peace and beauty of the valley and the dignity of the life of the lama priests. A man of fifty-five, with such a chequered career as being a member of the Imperial Academy, district governor of Kiashing, and senior councillor under General Sun Chuanfang, could properly be described as 'tired of politics'. When Sun was defeated by the Nationalist revolution, he had gone to Japan for about a year, where he was greatly impressed by the love of the Japanese people for their Emperor, and by the spirit which tied them to their past in spite of their modern progress. He had then left Jo-an with her uncle. After a year and a half, when it was safe for him to come back, he had returned to China, stopped in Peking, ranged over Jehol and the whole region of the Great

Wall, and loitered for months in Shansi with a set of Ku Yenwu's *Historical Geography*, studying ancient sculptures and stone monuments and tablets.

Tired of his wanderings, he had gone back to Si-an, where he had stayed for about a year. Usually reticent and occupied with his own studies, he had lived with his daughter and disdained to talk business with his brother. He was still the senior member of the family and was seated at the head of the table when they ate together, but he preferred to leave business to his brother, and they had very little else to talk about. His attitude towards local and national politics was one of amused tolerance, of the retired official who was not much impressed by the antics of the younger generation, which was, for him, past saving. He declined social parties, and very soon the local gentry knew that he had said good-bye to politics for good and left him alone.

He did not like the way Fanglin ran his business, but he said nothing about it. What pained him most was what was happening to his own family. Naturally, he thought very little of Tsujen, in spite of, and because of, his Western education, for Tsujen was unable to write a decent Chinese letter. Tsujen was not alone. Tu Chung could no more quote the classics in talking to him than he could to cows. So far as he was concerned, the third generation of the governor was going illiterate. His father's library was accumulating dust in the third court of the Tafuti.

His only care now was for his daughter, and she his only hope for solace and comfort. Between him and his daughter there had grown up an attachment which was unique. He gave his best to her, taught her the secrets of calligraphy, spent hours with her over Tang poetry, and told her anecdotes of the giants of half a century ago, of men like Tseng Kuofan, Chang Chih-tung, Tso Tsung-tang and Li Hung-chang, stories which fascinated Jo-an.

The previous summer he had invited a young man to come to Si-an. Liu was a man he had known while working in Sun Chuanfang's office and had picked as a possible son-in-law, principally because Liu was singularly gifted in ancient Chinese. He had encouraged the young man to come to Si-an, without saying that it was to meet his daughter. Liu understood as

much. But Liu had clammy hands and, besides, he had been brought up by one of those over-protecting mothers, and wore sweaters underneath his gown even in summer. In childhood his mother put a jacket over him when he sneezed once, added another when he sneezed twice, and still another when he sneezed three times, so that he could hardly balance himself and run about. His mother sealed up the windows in his room when September came. Jo-an took one look at him and knew that she could not marry this man even to oblige her father. Liu went back to Shanghai and that was the end of it.

Last autumn Tu Chung had come up to Sunganor. Then he visited the lamasery and fell in love with the place. He did not return that winter partly because the narrow gorge connecting Sunganor with the Dingkor Gumpa was blocked by snow. The dry, crisp air, the utter seclusion of the valley surrounded by snow-clad peaks, and the atmosphere of learning and peace made it a perfect retreat for him.

The Dingkor Gumpa was a monastery and a college, training about eighteen hundred young lamas, with regular courses of instruction and with degrees. He could talk Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics with these learned monks as he seldom could with the monks elsewhere in China. Most of the latter knew only how to burn incense and recite prayers. Here the students were put through a rigorous training in logic and metaphysics, some specialising in medicine, some in Tibetan and Chinese calendars. Besides, the extraordinary physical routine included standing for hours on the terrace during the cold nights in the month of November.

He longed to see his daughter again. She had matured rapidly and he felt a sense of companionship when talking with his own flesh and blood. She would enjoy a visit to the lamasery. Besides, she was graduating this summer, and he had the future on his mind. Then one morning he had a spell of unconsciousness, and it was with a sense of urgency that he wrote again to beg her to come.

* * * * *

The drivers led their ponies down a trail. Jo-an suggested that it would be more comfortable to dismount and go on foot. The keen air was pungent and tingled their senses with

its sharp resinous fragrance. The trail led through a pine forest straight towards the stream which cut the valley in two. On the other side of a cantilever wooden bridge, streets, or rather flights of steps, led upward by the sides of closely-packed and serried flat white buildings. The rampart of the temple itself was a wall some fifty feet high and two hundred feet long, flanked by towers at the corners rising some hundreds of feet from slanted foundations. A broad flight of stone steps led up to a large terrace, bounded by stone balconies, above which prayer-flags fluttered in the wind.

Having paid off the drivers, they went into the inner yard of the temple and asked a priest in charge of reception where Mr. Tu of Sunganor was staying.

"Are you Mr. Tu's daughter?" asked the priest. "I have been asked to watch for you."

Jo-an's father was treated royally here as a scholar and a distinguished friend of the head lama.

"Is he very ill?" Jo-an asked in an anxious voice.

"No, not really. Come, I will show you the way." The priest, although a Tibetan, spoke fluent and perfectly polished Chinese, this being one of the reasons he was chosen for his position. They could hear the deep hum of the priests at prayer inside the temple.

A side door led from the court of the temple into a separate long two-storeyed building, with balconies looking upon a stone-paved court. Jo-an's heart beat hard and her throat tightened, as a tumult of emotions surged up in her breast. She felt a slight sense of guilt that she had allowed her father to live alone so far from home. How ill was he? Would he look older?

The priest led the way up a discoloured staircase in the covered corridor. Jo-an paused and looked at Li Fei, and smoothed a tuft of hair which was always in danger of falling over his forehead.

The priest lifted a blue cloth curtain and announced that Miss Tu had arrived. The wooden shutters were closed and a silver lamp was shining upon the table. Li Fei saw an old man in a white jacket sitting up in bed, smoking a white copper shuiyen (tobacco pipe with water in it). The lamplight shone on a head of white hair cropped short and a long white beard coming down the chest. Tu Chung laid his copper pipe on

the table, while his vigorous eyes flashed in their direction. While Li Fei hung back, Jo-an rushed forward to his bedside.

Tu Chung reached out a hand and pulled her to him and said in a deep voice, tense with happiness: "Jo-an, I am glad you have come."

Jo-an bit her lower lip to hold back her tears. "Father, are you well?"

"I am well. Something happened the other day, but we shall talk about that later. It is a year since I saw you."

His eyes turned towards the stranger standing erect and silent in the shadow. Jo-an quickly said: "Father, this is Mr Li Fei. He has wanted to make your acquaintance."

Tu Chung's sharp eyes studied the young man in momentary surprise. It was obvious that this must be a close friend of his daughter. He liked the young man's straight look and clear eyes under his distinct black eyebrows.

Remembering Jo-an's instructions, Li Fei stepped forward and made a deep bow. He was trying to create a good impression by observing a rather outmoded etiquette. But his voice was firm when he said, in the stilted language of mandarin intercourse:

"I have long wished to listen to your learned counsel, but I have never had the pleasure. Your daughter has kindly offered to introduce me to you."

"Sit down," said Tu Chung affably, surprised to hear a language that was euphonious and sweet to his ears, a language he had seldom heard since long ago. Li Fei's use of the phrase *ling ai* for 'your daughter' made the reference to Jo-an easy and dignified without being cheap and familiar.

The usual exchange of courtesies followed between the old father and the young man. Tu Chung saw a lingering softness in his daughter's look upon the young man while they talked. The father spoke with vigour and his mind was active. Veins stood out on his forehead and deep fine lines marked his heavy brow and eyelids. There was nothing in his full, fleshy face and his ruddy complexion to indicate that he was unwell.

Turning to his daughter, the father said: "You two must be tired after the journey. Have you been shown your rooms?"

Jo-an and Li Fei turned to go. When they reached the door,

the father called to her: "Tell the cook to prepare something extra and to warm up eight ounces of rice wine. Have it served in the dining-room upstairs. Come and see me when you are ready. I want to talk to you."

Jo-an did not keep him waiting long; in ten minutes she was back. Her father was sitting in his chair in an old deep-blue satin gown that she knew well, ample and broad-sleeved, and on his feet he wore the old-fashioned cloth-soled shoes with a double ridge on the toes.

She surveyed the room. It was one of the best in the building. The wooden planks of the floor were covered with an old heavy carpet. On the wall hung a sacred painting on silk, called a *tangka*, portraying, in beautiful miniature tracings, episodes of the Buddha legend. In a corner stood a copper brazier with a large bronze kettle. On a small table, decorated with an elaborately carved panel, stood a Tibetan teapot with a huge spout and tea-cups of intricately carved silver. A number of gowns were hung on nails on the wall. Some soiled clothes lay on a cane-bottomed chair near the door. Against the window-casing, which sloped upwards, stood a long table on which lay an ink-slab and a pot of large and small writing-brushes, by the side of two pieces of clean laundry. This sight was distressing to Jo-an. With a woman's eye she had noticed that his white inner jacket was yellow at the collar and cuffs, just like when he had returned home from Shansi. It had taken Tangma two or three washings to bring back the pure white colour of the cloth.

"Are you really comfortable here? Who is serving you?" asked Jo-an.

"I am very comfortable indeed. I have a manservant. It is a nice cosy place after you get to know it, and it is not lonely like the house at Sunganor. There are always things going on at the temple.

"What do you do all day?"

"I read and take walks. I am teaching some of the young monks Chinese. There are some Chinese here, too. Last month I wrote a copy of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* for the head lama at his request. It is very soothing work for the mind."

She opened a package of medicinal roots which Chunmei had sent. The old man examined them carefully, holding the

pieces of ginseng against the light, and appreciated their excellent quality.

"I still have some left from the package they sent me at New Year."

Distress came into Jo-an's eyes. "There were only three pieces, hardly three or four ounces. Is there no one to make a stew for you?"

"It is too much bother. I cut a slice and keep it in my mouth. It is just as good that way."

"You wrote to me that you were ill. I was so worried."

"I am all right now. One day I got up in the morning and suddenly fell unconscious. Laotu found me on the floor and lifted me to the bed. It was the first time this has happened. I suppose it is old age. I did not know anything at all."

"I don't think you can get the proper service and attention here. Father, I beg you to come home. You should see a good doctor. At home we have Tangma who can make the medicinal soup for you and see that you are really comfortable."

She told him many things about the family and then added: "You must not think badly of Chunmei. She had a good talk with me just before I came. She was thinking only of the good of our Tu family. She is practically running the family now and Uncle has decided to legalise her standing as a daughter-in-law."

"I don't think badly of Chunmei at all. I am glad that she is being given a proper position. It was my brother's fault from the very beginning. What did she say to you?"

"She said she was worried, that Tsujen has no son and that we do not look like a thriving family at all, that you and uncle are old, and that things may change."

His eyes flashed in surprise. "I did not think she could see so far ahead. And she is right, too."

"What do you mean, Father?"

"Look at what my brother is doing. Your grandfather left a good name, an honoured one, in Sunganor. Now your uncle has that dam built, cutting off the water supply for the valley. Heaven will punish our Tu house if I do not do something to stop it. It makes me burn with deep shame. We received our heritage from your grandfather, the big properties at the lake and in the city. But what my brother does not see is that the

real heritage is the good name, the honour and respect the people always have had for the Tu family. I have lived long enough to know that something is going to happen, that heaven's justice never fails. I am more comfortable here, not to have to see the face of my brother."

The father's voice stopped and he stroked his beard. Jo-an was conscious of his gaze and met it as he said: "Tell me about this Mr. Li who has come with you. Is he some kind of politician?"

Her face was suddenly serious. "No, he is a writer working for a newspaper. He is very brilliant and quite well-known."

Her small face coloured and her lips dipped in a smile.

"How long have you known him?"

"About two months." She bent her head and there was tenderness in her eyes as she raised them to say in a tremulous voice: "Father, I know him well and I love him. I have invited him to come for you to see him. He may be bashful at first, but you will like him when you know him better."

"He is good-mannered. Is he good in our ancient literature?"

"He is good. But, Father, no young man today is as good as you are. He is intelligent and quick to learn. He was afraid to come and meet you because you are such a great scholar."

The father looked at her impassioned face and said: "Well, we shall see."

* * * * *

Twilight in the mountain retreat of a lamasery was not desolately tranquil as Li Fei had imagined it to be. The evening song of the birds, the raucous cawing of crows, and the shrill cries of eagles on the wing mingled with the sounds of tinkling bells and the drums of the priests at prayer. From the terrace of the temple came a hum of human voices and the long low calls of conch shells and wooden horns resounding for the sunset service.

The lamasery was a little town in itself. In the lay quarter for guests and pilgrims there were a number of men and women, and the wooden boards of the balcony creaked and thumped with the occasional footsteps of passing guests.

At dinner Jo-an was quietly happy sitting at a small square table next to her father and opposite Li Fei. She had taken

off her long gown and was in a suit of deep purple jacket and black quilted trousers. She saw her father pour a cup of wine for Li Fei while the latter half-rose from his seat, holding out both hands to receive the cup. She had never seen Li Fei so formal.

Towards the end of the dinner, she said: "Father, I am graduating this summer and I want you to come. Li Fei will be going away."

"Where to?" quickly asked the father.

The young man replied: "To Turkistan. My paper asked me to go, and I really want to go myself."

Jo-an said: "And he cannot go back to Si-an this summer. He barely escaped this time." Briefly she told of the arrest and shooting of the editor and Li Fei added the story of the detention and escape of O-yun.

Tu Chung shook his head and his big eyes glowed as he listened.

"Perhaps I was rash to write that article," said Li Fei, "but somebody had to say something."

"You did right. I am glad that you are not a Kuomintang man."

"Certainly I am not," replied Li Fei spiritedly. "No politics for me."

"Perhaps our views are alike. Come to my room and we will talk." Tu Chung pushed back his chair, and stood up, stroking his beard and glancing at the young man with deepened interest.

c "When are you leaving?" he asked as they walked out.

"I shall be going to Lanchow on my way back. Then I shall be going up to Suchow to see General Ma Chungying."

In his own room, Tu Chung showed Li Fei a chair while he took up his water-pipe and tobacco and seated himself on the low chair. His servant brought in the hot towels and the tea. Jo-an seated herself on the bed, resting her arm on the end-board.

The lamplight shone on Tu Chung's white hair while he smoked. It was a pleasure to watch the old man blow the smouldering paper roller expertly into a flame and light the pipe. The water at the bottom of the pipe gurgled and he blew out a blue stream of smoke with evident satisfaction. While he

talked he kept repeating the manipulations, pressing, lighting and blowing the tobacco out of the copper tube, for each filling only gave one or two puffs.

"Jo-an has told me that you are well-known as a writer," he said to Li Fei. "In what kind of style do you write?"

"I write newspaper articles, in the vernacular." He saw the darkening growl in the old man's eyes, and quickly added: "But no one can write well in the vernacular unless he knows the ancient literature."

"The important thing is to have a firm base in the literature and thoughts of the great ancients. Do you read poetry?"

"I read it for pleasure but I do not write it."

"Perhaps you have seen the couplet I wrote for the governor's yamen. It is hung in the reception-room." The old man's eyes glowed with a quick flash, as if he were enjoying a joke secret to himself.

"I have seen it. I remember that it is the text of one of Tu Fu's poems. Everybody who saw it admired your beautiful writing."

"What do you think of it?" the father asked, a riddle on his face. "You remember the lines?"

Jo-an was tense.

"Yes, I do." He repeated the lines:

"By the desolate pines the Celestial Lake glitters;
Above the ruffled sand dunes the Snow Mountain gleams.

It makes a perfect picture of the bleak landscape of the North-West. The Celestial Lake (Tienshui) and the Snow Mountain (Tienshan of Sinkiang) make a perfect pair."

Tu Chung was pleased and Jo-an relaxed with an exultant smile. The father said: "Tu Fu wrote that poem for one Mr. Kuo who was coming to this region, war-scarred and pillaged by the Turkis in his times. I had a purpose in writing that couplet. Can you guess what I mean?"

"No, sir," answered Li Fei.

The old man blew out another puff and said: "No, I don't suppose you do, nor does anyone else. I did not intend it as a compliment. The governor himself can't read, of course. None of his guests or those bright young men of the Kuomintang

can read what is left unsaid there. So it is safe. If they knew they would have taken it down already."

Li Fei thought for a while, trying to recall the verse. Suddenly he remembered the remaining lines and the meaning flashed across his mind and he chuckled.

"You see what I mean?" the father asked with a delighted smile.

"What is it?" asked Jo-an, mystified but happy.

Recovering his breath, Li Fei answered: "It is:

Foxes chatter in the abandoned cities,
And tigers and wolves roam the empty towns.

Governor Yang will be mad when he finds out that covert reference." The phrase 'tigers and wolves' clearly refers to fighting war-lords and rapacious officials.

"You must keep this a secret and let them keep the couplet in that reception-room and the governor very proud of it."

"Governor Yang and I are hardly on good terms. When he finds that out, Si-an won't be safe for you either, Uncle Tu."

Tu Chung, glad to find someone who could discuss Tu Fu with him, began to recall the poems, lost in a different world.

"Tu Fu stayed around Tienshui for quite a time," he said. Then he hummed the lines:

North of the Yellow River is the Haishi Army,
The war drums and clanging bells rend the air.
Long and constant is the neighing of numberless steeds,
And high-nosed Turkis move in great hordes.

For ten thousand li lie belts of shifting sands;
The army moves westward across the Northern Pass,
Leaving evermore new corpses on the battlefield,
And the old ghosts of veterans do not return.

"In those times the Uighurs came into Kansu and Shensi as allies of the Tang Emperor and many of them settled down here after the war. That is why we have so many Moslems in this province today."

While the old man talked on, Li Fei listened respectfully.

Jo-an was proud of Li Fei and happy that Li Fei had gained the respect of her learned father.

"It is a pity you are going away so soon," said the father, "I would enjoy more talks with you. Are you going away for long?"

"I don't know. I have this assignment and I must keep away until the Si-an trouble blows over and I can come back. Governor Yang is really a good-natured man. Perhaps you or Jo-an's uncle can speak for me."

"I know. The governor's wife is more intelligent than her husband. It is she who is really running the Shensi government. You stay away for a while and I am sure I shall be able to do something so that you can come back safely. As for Mohammedan trouble, you don't have to go so far. It may spread to Sunganor itself."

"Why, what do you think will happen?"

"We Chinese are never fair to the Moslem tribes. They will bear government oppression just so much. Once the revolt starts, and the call for Moslem rebellion is sounded, it will spread like a conflagration. I have seen the horrible cold-blooded slaughter of innocent men, women, and children. I saw the Sining revolt in my youth. Corpses piled high against hillocks, on the roads, and across the thresholds. Jerking masses of bleeding flesh, and piles of parched and burned skeletons; some who died by violence and some by starvation. Fat dogs and sated vultures, charred villages and whole valleys reeking with the odours of death and putrefaction. Empty towns and grotesque chimneys falling over on one side, just as Tu Fu said in his poem. My father saved this region from the blind fury of racial slaughter. You should go and see the Moslem valley now, and you will not be surprised if the storm breaks there, too."

Jo-an suddenly thought of her childhood playmate and asked: "Father, where is Tantse? Has he left the village?"

"He has left us and gone back to his people. I met him in the Moslem village and he was asking about you. He is quite grown-up now."

"Why did he leave?"

"You know what your uncle did. First he stopped the Moslems from fishing in our lake, driving their fishermen out

of business. Some went away leaving their wives and children. I learned of their stories from Azal, their headman. There were two brothers; the elder one, Maksud, killed himself because he was too old to change his work, leaving his widow Mizra. She took to drink, and the younger brother, Aqil Qarib, is supporting the widow and her children. Then that cousin of yours, Tsujen, built the dam at the mouth of the Moslem valley. It is not the sort of thing that our family should do. We are piling up a fortune on the ruins of our neighbours. Your uncle has not replied to my letter. I shall have to go back and speak to him about it. I am still the senior head of the family, and I will not allow the whole valley of the Mohammedans to be made poor because we want to get a few more dollars. Jo-an, you remember your grandfather and how in his time the Moslems loved us. You should go and see the valley for yourself, see what is happening there. When we elders are gone you will share the property with Tsujen, and I don't want you to suffer because of what has been done. The Moslems will not put up with it for ever. This is the sort of thing that has caused Moslem revolts, taking their land, depriving them of their livelihood, and all that nonsense about compelling them to change their way of life. We have still some friends left in the Moslem village, Azal, Hijaz and others of the older generation who still remember the governor. Hijaz himself was one of the fishermen driven out of business. We used to catch fish together when we were boys and broil it over a camp-fire on the banks. Hijaz has not changed. But most of the Moslems are bitter."

The father turned to Li Fei. "By the way," he said, "Hijaz has a son, Hakim, who is now a colonel with General Ma Chungying. If you are going to see the General, Hijaz can give you a letter of introduction. It may be useful."

Jo-an said: "Father, I wouldn't dare to go to the Moslem village without you, but I would love to meet your friends. Why don't you come with us? We can spend a few more days together on the lake."

"Perhaps I will. Now you must go to bed and have a good rest after such a hard day. And I think you should get up early to see the sunrise worship. It is something you will not forget."

Li Fei rose to go, and Jo-an said: "I shall stay and speak a few words with my father."

When Li Fei had wished them good-night, she asked: "Father, what do you think of him?"

"I think he is a sound young man."

Tears stood in her eyes. "I know he will come to ask you for my hand. I wanted so much for you to approve."

"I congratulate you, Jo-an. I tested him on that poem purposely, you know."

"I want you to have a son-in-law who can talk with you. We will have a happy home together."

"You are a good girl to think so much of your old father." The old man took his daughter's hand and patted it.

She had brought along with ginseng a package of *yinerh* ('silver mushroom'). "I will make some *yinerh* soup for you before you go to sleep," said the daughter. She rose and opened the package lying on the table, and looked about for sugar. Seeing none, she went out and knocked at Li Fei's door. "Please go downstairs and get some sugar. I am making silver mushroom soup for him."

Li Fei went down and came back with a half-bowlful of sugar, then caught her in his arms and kissed her, but she merely touched his lips and said: "I must go. I shall come and tell you when I have put my father to bed."

She went back to her father's room and began to soak the mushrooms in a bowl of water. In the copper brazier there were still some red coals. She took more pieces of charcoal from a basket and threw them in and, squatting, began to fan the fire and put the pot on the brazier.

"It is late and you should go to bed," the father said.

"I am not sleepy. I shall wait till you have the soup. You get into bed."

She got up and helped her father to take off his gown, and put it on the chair near the bed. In doing so, she felt in the pocket and pulled out a soiled handkerchief. She put it on the pile of soiled clothing in the chair near the door.

"Where do you keep your clean laundry?"

The father pointed to a cabinet. The clean underwear was on a top shelf along with long rolls of writing paper. She had to stand on her toes to reach it. She pulled out a clean handker-

chief and put it in his gown pocket. The old man lay and watched his daughter and said with a smile: "Jo-an, it is good to have you around."

She sat on her father's bed and smoked a cigarette while waiting for the mushroom to stew properly.

"What will you do when you graduate this summer?"

"If you come home, I will study Chinese poetry with you and I will have the whole day occupied. Father, there are holes in your socks and the lower button of your gown is loose."

"You have grown to be a woman like your mother. Li Fei is lucky to have you."

"Do you think I shall make a good wife to him?"

"You will. A man needs a woman around."

"I know that very well. You have been drifting like a mendicant monk ever since Mother died."

The soup was simmering over the charcoal fire with a pleasant gurgle. The father patted her hand and said: "It is boiling already."

"It must stew for another fifteen minutes. You don't know anything about it, do you?"

"I am afraid I don't."

"Who does the mending of clothes for you?"

"There are some women down at the bazaar who do it for all the priests."

When the silver mushroom soup was ready, she went and took the pot from the fire. She poured the soup into a large tea-cup and watched her father drink it. He reached out for a second cup, and she gave it to him.

"It's just like we are at home, isn't it?"

"Yes. Now you must go to bed."

As she had done so many times at home, she performed the last act of retiring by drawing the bed-curtains together and wishing her father good-night. Then she blew out the light, groped out of the room, and closed the door.

"You were hours away," said Li Fei, when she silently opened his door and came towards his bed. She bent and gave him a passionate kiss. He held her tresses close to his face.

"Aren't you tired?" he said when he found his breath.

"Never too tired for your love," she murmured.

"Is he asleep?"

"Yes," she smiled.
"Then blow out the light."

"I must get back to my room quickly. And remember we are going to see the sunrise worship."

* * * * *

On the stone terrace the air was still and the prayer flags drooped in sleep. As soon as Tu Chung heard the sounding of the conch shell, he got up and went to rap at Jo-an's and Li Fei's doors. They hurriedly put on their gowns, and Jo-an tied a scarf around her head.

They went out to the terrace, which had begun to fill with dark human figures. The night was heavy on the land and the land had not yet waked. In the distance patches of grey and black marked the hillsides, and down in the valley a band of silver-grey water mirrored the morning glow of the pale sky.

Soon there was a steady human hum from the student monks. Tu Chung mingled and talked with them. Gradually the purple and red of their robes became distinguishable. Jo-an was fascinated by the hats of the officers, of which there was a great variety, such as children might make with folded paper. The provost, whose duty was to keep order, walked about in a purple toga and a tall helmet like a Roman general's, with a ridge rising in an arc to the top, fringed with yellow tassels.

Long low notes from a wooden horn fifteen feet long sounded to salute the approach of the sunrise and to call all creation to worship. Flocks of birds swept up from the wooded slope and circled in the greying sky, their cries filling the air as if in response to the call of the horn. The young monks hurriedly took their positions and squatted on the terrace, their hands clasped in the attitude of prayer.

While they were thus seated, mumbling their prayers, calling for blessing on the animals of all creation, the first finger of dawn touched the peak of the Osa Takit and the eastern horizon brightened with an incandescent whiteness. The white turned into a bashful pink, for the dawn came shyly, yet inexorably, driving the night out of the sky. Then the orb of the sun was visible, and its rays touched crags of the gap opposite the lamasery and lit up the tree-tops of the near-by forests. Like the breath of life, the light penetrated the dormant valley and

whispered to it to waken. The drooping flags began to stir lazily as a gentle breeze passed over the terrace like the movement of an invisible spirit. Across the valley birds' songs filled the air, joyful at the return of the day.

Prayer over, the monks returned to their dormitories.

"This is a great way of life," Tu Chung told Jo-an and Li Fei, as they went back to their rooms. "The Tibetans have something that we have not. So have the Moslems. People who talk of these tribes as if they were barbarians do not know what they are saying. Why should we change their way of life?"

17

THE DAY AFTER THEY WENT DOWN TO SUNGANOR, TU CHUNG took his daughter to visit the valley. The Moslem village, of about three hundred people spread along the valley, was north-west of the lake, separated from the Sunganor house by the high pine-covered ridge which came down to the shore. Towards the north the land sloped gradually, marked by oat-fields and farm-houses, with a wide rocky river-bed in the centre. On both sides of the river, pasture-lands rolled along the foothills, graced with rows of tall poplars, until they merged with the jagged blue hill lines in the distance. On the east the lake opened out, reflecting the red hills. Here was a wider and more open view of the lake and the country to the north. The lake was three miles north to south, but here it was about five miles to the distant hills on the east, bending around the rocky ridge on the south side. The Sunganor house was closed in by the rocky headlands on a broad recess of the lake. While the view from the house had a picturesque grandeur, the unobstructed view from the Mohammedan side had a soft grace and charm, with varying uplands and lowlands and wood and stream ending in faint, multiple blue hill lines on the horizon, such as are frequently seen along the foothills of a mountain.

The village itself nestled around the curve on level ground, sheltered from the northern winds by hillsides covered with persimmons and chestnuts and maples. It had been good fishing and grazing ground. It might be described as the last out-

post of the Mohammedan area along the Tao valley, reaching to the very foot of the Min Mountains. The centre of the Mohammedan population was in Hochow on the border of Kokonor and western Kansu. Some of the people were descendants of Uighur and other Turkish soldiers who had come a thousand years ago and settled here, while others were of more recent origin, dribbling in from Chinese Turkestan in the centuries which followed. The inhabitants of this village were a Turki tribe who had come here over a century ago, as the age of the mosque, of a discoloured grey, with glazed green and yellow minaret and cupola, testified. The few streets, flanked by clay walls and flat roofs, led east-west to the square with a fountain where the old mosque stood.

On this day the square was filled with men standing in knots busily talking. The men wore Turki garb, embroidered skull-caps cocked backwards and quilted tunics buttoned in the centre and coming down to their knees. While the men talked, children dressed in rags and mostly barefooted stood about and listened. Groups of women in soft printed cotton tunics and broad bloomers stood at the street corners and in doorways, wearing long white cloth veils over their heads. The younger women, still following the Uighur custom of the Tarim valley where their tribe came from, had their faces partly covered, revealing, however, their beautiful, large brown eyes. These women, Tu Chung said, were good dancers, and many could strum a guitar and sing their Turki songs. The women of Kucha and points beyond towards Kashgar were reputed for their grace and beauty. In this far outpost in southern Kansu they still kept their ancient faith and customs, for unlike the majority of the Chinese Mohammedans (Tungans) of Kansu they still kept to their Turki language and costumes.

While standing aloof from the men in the square, the women were no less concerned in what was going on. The hubbub which had been created was due to an announcement by their Ahun, the priest-leader of the village, that the young Chinese Mohammedan commander Ma Chungying was mustering a troop of ten thousand for his Moslem army. The news had come from Taochow farther north. Able-bodied young men, as many as the village could afford, were to report to Taochow for enrolment. Azal, the priest, a short man with a long narrow

face, a high nose and a whitish beard, wearing a priest's white turban, was surrounded by a large group of questioners. He was telling them of the war that was going on out in Turkestan, of the siege of Hami and the fighting around Turfan in which the Turki nation was directly involved, and the terrible punishment which Governor Chin of Sinkiang was inflicting on the Turki inhabitants of the region. General Ma, now in Suchow near the Sinkiang border, was recruiting an army to help them, for the Chinese Moslems were united to them by their religion. The matter of sending recruits and contributions of horses was largely left in the hands of the priest who was their leader in things civil as well as religious.

The people were so occupied with the discussions that Tu Chung's group arrived almost unobserved. The well-dressed figures in Chinese garb, however, soon attracted notice, especially the young Chinese girl in a deep red sweater over her blue silk gown, with a bright purple silk scarf tied around her head.

Tu Chung went up towards Azal and waited to catch his attention, while Li Fei and Jo-an looked around, wondering at the commotion.

A tall and broad-shouldered man of fifty, with a greyish beard, came up and slapped Tu Chung on the back.

Tu Chung turned and recognised his boyhood friend.

"What are you doing here?" asked Hijaz, his broad bronze face melted in smiles.

"I have brought my daughter and a friend to see the village and to have a talk with Azal."

Hijaz's big voice and merry laugh attracted notice and many turned to look. Azal saw Tu Chung and, dropping his questioners, pushed his way to him. He gave the old Chinese scholar his Moslem salute by placing his hands across his chest, stroking his beard and saying: "Salaam!" Many of the villagers knew that the old Chinese gentleman was the son of Governor Tu Heng and the owner of the lake.

"What is happening?" Tu Chung asked.

Azal briefly told him. Now the young men dispersed and came and stood around, with much whispering and sly comment. The women, too, attracted by the sight of a well-dressed Chinese girl, came nearer. Tu Chung introduced his daughter and Li

Fei. Some women began jabbering aloud, and a fat woman of forty with watery eyes, dressed in a greasy black coat, her arms akimbo, was making more noise than the others. Li Fei and Jo-an could not understand what she was saying, but they saw that she was angry. Her voice was hoarse and exasperated and quick as she pointed her short, stubby fingers at Azal, who said something in reply, trying to calm her. It almost seemed as if their appearance at this juncture had added to the troubles of the village. The young men watched sullenly, only the black of their eyes visible. The younger women near the fountain were staring at Jo-an in wide-eyed curiosity, and some of them were smiling at what the fat old woman was saying.

The visitors did not know that Azal had been telling of the slaughter and the destruction of Turki villages in Turfan by the Chinese soldiers, and that the listeners' anger had been roused. A war was starting, and it was against the Chinese. Their descent into the Moslem village had been most inopportune. In the villagers' eyes these three visitors were visible representatives of Chinese oppression, which made war and conscription necessary.

The fat woman, failing to get a proper answer from the priest, now addressed herself to Jo-an, gesticulating nervously. She jerked at her arm and was asking her a question which Jo-an had no means of understanding. Jo-an was miserable and Li Fei forcefully put the woman's arm down.

"Stop it, Mizra! They are my friends," Hijaz bellowed.

"What did she say?" asked Li Fei.

"She was saying that since you have forbidden us to enter your grounds, why do you come into ours?"

At this moment a young man pushed his way through the crowd, a lean and muscular fellow with deep-set eyes and a wispy moustache, a fur cap on his head. He broke into the inner ring and a bright glow came into his eyes as he recognised the girl he had played with in his childhood.

"Why, Jo-an!" he cried in Chinese.

"Oh, Tantse!" Jo-an exclaimed.

Tantse's face was beaming as he put his hand on her shoulder and looked down into her white face silhouetted by her purple scarf.

"I came to see you," she said, looking at his young face and

his agile body. Tears sprang to her eyes as memories of their childhood days floated across her mind.

Tantse turned and touched his chest to greet her father.

"You must come to my place, Mr. Tu. I can offer only a simple lunch, but I haven't seen Jo-an for so long."

"I have asked Mr. Tu to come to my house," said Hijaz. He turned to the young man: "Why don't you come also?"

The party moved on, Tu Chung, Hijaz, and Azal walking in front and Jo-an, Li Fei and Tantse behind, followed by a large group of idle, barefooted children. A young girl in a white veil eyed them uneasily from the corner of the square. Tantse waved to her and said: "Miriam, I am going to Hijaz's. Tell your mother that I'll be back at the field soon after lunch."

The young girl looked beneath her deep lashes at the Chinese girl beside him.

Hijaz's house stood on the outskirts of the village, about fifty yards from the shore. It was one of the better houses of the village. Like all Mohammedan houses, it had a garden of shrubs and trees. The ancient love of trees peculiar to inhabitants of the desert had not died out, for trees symbolised the presence of water and shade. The Moslem heaven itself is pictured as a place filled with fruit-yards and vineyards and springs, with an inexhaustible supply of water. Hijaz's garden was bigger than usual, and since he had had to give up fishing he had turned gardener, he said. His son, Al Hakim, was doing well, and he was able to add to his property, boasting a house with four or five spacious rooms. The house looked out towards the lake over a stretch of vacant, uncultivated ground covered with shrubs of samac. The red hills on the bank were visible from the house except where they were hidden by a big maple tree, on which magpies were chattering noisily.

The parlour was furnished with divans and carpets and tapestry on the wall. An inscribed photograph of Ma Chung-ying on horseback hung prominently on the wall. Li Fei took a careful look at the handsome young general and was told he was only twenty-two.

When the guests were seated, two boys came out with trays containing raisins, nuts, and cups of horse milk. The happy grandfather introduced the children to the visitors.

"Tell your mother how many we have for lunch," he told the

elder boy. Tedja counted the persons with his fingers and went in with his younger brother Ali, a boy of three.

Tu Chung whispered to his daughter to take the nuts and milk, for it would be impolite not to taste the food offered.

Azal's eyes were sad as he spoke of his responsibility.

"This village has to send twenty men within a month. Most of the men cannot leave their farms and fields. Some of the young men will want to join up themselves. I shall have to see. Many young sons of the village have gone away. We have tried to avoid war, but war has come, and when Ma Chungying calls, our people are willing to support him. So far this region has been spared, but women and children are being slaughtered in cold blood. The palace of the king of Hami has been plundered and burned, and not a roof is left standing. I hear that his second son is leading the battle around the deserts of Turfan."

But Tu Chung wanted to talk with Azal about a problem nearer home. On his previous visit he had seen the conditions in the village and the impoverishment of the countryside because of the dam and the drying up of the river-bed. It might be argued that the dam was necessary to keep the fish from escaping into the river below. But the whole life of the farmers living down the valley was affected by it. The priest had gone up to Changshien and protested on behalf of the inhabitants, but the magistrate had turned a deaf ear. The lake was indubitably the property of the Tu family, and the Tu family was too powerful to offend. Tu Fanglin was making good money from the salt fish business and he was satisfied. It was Tsujen's idea of efficiency that if you are going to keep the fish in the lake it should be properly enclosed. And legally the Tu family had every right to do it. To take what fish you can catch—and there were plenty of fish in the lake before the dam was built—and make a little money and let other fish escape was inefficient, and, to Tsujen, very Chinese. In terms of scientific management, that was not developing the business to its full capacity, not 'aggressive' enough and not calculated for greater expansion.

As for the feelings of the Moslems in the valley, Tsujen had his own idea about that. One of the things that had horrified Sianghua on their first trip to Sunganor was her husband's way of announcing his arrival. He carried a hunting-gun when he came out to the lake. Arriving at night on the top of the ridge,

he fired a shot. The report crackled over a great distance and the night howled like a wounded animal. Then followed a second shot and a third. Sianghua did not think it heroic and she did not like a man firing a gun for show or pleasure.

"Why did you do that?"

"I do that always when I come to the lake to let those Mohammedan dogs know that I am here."

Tsujen had neither the desire nor quite the courage to venture into Moslem territory. He had satisfied himself that they were uneducated and uncivilised barbarians. That there was a law of the human heart, that a gun would be answered by a gun, he had not the faintest idea, as it was certainly not taught in all his courses on banking and business.

Jo-an was still upset by what had happened at the square.

"Who was that fat woman?" she asked Hijaz.

"She is Mizra." Hijaz rolled his words slowly. His voice was naturally big. "Did she frighten you?"

"Indeed, she looked as if she could have killed me."

"You must not mind her. But you must understand that her husband killed himself the year after he was put out of the fishing business. Maksud was too old to change his ways and he sulked at home and refused to do anything. One day he went out to the lake, rowed himself out to the middle, and drowned himself. They didn't find his body for two days. His brother Aqil went to Ta Chow, and he keeps stables there and is supporting his brother's widow and his nephews with what he can. She does odd jobs, mending clothes for people and helping with field work. Then twice or three times a month she disappears from the village and comes home smelling of liquor."

Maksud's death had been four or five years ago, but in that little village every event had an exaggerated importance. Hijaz's son, colonel in Ma Chungying's army, was sending money home. He had few worries and was now living with his daughter-in-law and his two grandsons. What energy he had in his huge body was used up in pottering about his vegetable garden, pruning his fruit trees, and strumming his guitar in the evenings.

"You mustn't mind her," he repeated. "You see, when your good uncle put us off the lake quite a few homes were broken up. Of the two brothers of the Kader family, Hassan went away and was never heard from. We hear that he joined up with the

army and was killed. Sohrab is now living in Hochow, and is able to send money home to support his mother and his sister Miriam."

Azal now addressed himself to Tu Chung. "No, things have not looked pretty on the lake for years. The last time you were here you said you might do something about the dam. Did you speak to your brother about it?"

"I have been up at Dingkor Gompa all this winter. I wrote my brother a short time ago, but he has not answered. As a matter of fact, I have come to talk to you about this. I do not think my brother will be influenced by what I say. I would like to take a look at the dam again."

Hijaz suggested that they could have a perfect view of the dam from the garden, and they all went out. Looking over the hedge, they saw the beautiful lake below. A hundred yards from them, the water came up to the border formed by the dam and gurgled through the boulders into a rivulet below. The dam was an ingenious piece of construction. A series of pillars of cement stood at intervals, while large hampers of boulders were placed against them, raising the water level by some ten feet. The old river-bed here was fairly level, and the water which seeped through the boulders flowed over pebbly rapids and gathered in a channel in the centre for about another hundred yards, where the wide rocky river-bed turned northward. In the distance the course of the water meandered through a stretch of banks and rapids, zigzagging between the east and the west shores. Little islets with green patches on them stood in the middle of the river-bed. Fish were thus not able to escape through the dam, while the volume of water that came through had been reduced to one-tenth of what it had been, because the water, unable to use its old natural outlet, had found its way out through various channels on the opposite shore of the lake.

Silently, Tu Chung went beyond the hedge and down towards the dam, followed by the others. It was only five minutes' walk. The swish-swash of the escaping water increased as they approached. Twenty feet above them stood the boulders, spotted with green. These boulders, small in themselves, were held together by strips of bamboo woven into large baskets seven or eight feet square. As the boulders were dumped into the bamboo casing, they formed collectively, in effect, a giant boulder weigh-

ing several tons. It was the old way by which river embankments were held and the water-course regulated in the northwest, and it was easy to set up and easy to cut loose for repair work.

Tantse had come down with Jo-an and Li Fei. Jo-an said to Tantse: "Do you remember how we used to go barefoot into the shallow water and catch crayfish?" His eyes dwelled fondly on the Chinese girl and his admiration was frank and unfeigned. She laughed gaily. "I did not know you were here all the time. The last time I was here, I asked Ah-San about you. He didn't know. Don't you ever come over to our side?"

Tantse looked down to the ground. "No, and you know why."

"Tantse, I suppose you must hate us."

Tantse drew himself up. Cocking his head and looking at her, he said: "Things in the valley have changed since we were children. I always remember you and your parents. They were so kind to me. But since the dam was built our people are naturally angry. I am afraid that when a drought comes we are going to tear that dam down. It is not your father's fault, but we hate your uncle and young Tu."

Tantse went up to the top of the dam and, standing over the mass of boulders, looked down smiling.

"Look out you don't fall," cried Jo-an. Tantse laughed.

Tu Chung stood as if transfixed. Clearly something was going on in his mind. Near-by was a shed where the hull of an old boat partly stuck out, lying on the sand. Hijaz's bronze face shone in the sun as he turned to Tu Chung and said:

"There lies my old boat. Sometimes I come to pass a summer night out here. You know, once a fisherman always a fisherman. I lie on the planks wrapped up in a blanket and smell the fishy smell of the water. It does one's soul good to open one's eyes in the middle of the night and look up at the stars and inhale the fresh air coming over the lake."

Tu Chung glanced at his old friend. The words of Hijaz stung him with an inner shame. "How long ago did you give up fishing?"

"Four or five years ago. When your brother said it was your lake and I couldn't fish in it, I couldn't. Some of us did go out at first, secretly of course, mostly at night. But when that nephew of yours came back—we call him young Tu—he had

patrols out armed with guns, with orders to shoot at any of our boats seen on the water. You could steal a catch once in a while, but you can't stand the chance of being shot at every day. So we hauled in our boats and let them rot ashore."

"Is your boat still good for the water?"

"I think so. It needs some rigging up. What do you mean?"

"I mean would you like to go out on the lake again? It is mine as well as my brother's. When my old friend says he would like to go fishing again, who is going to stop him? The whole thing is wrong and I am going to take it up with my brother."

Hijaz drew up short. An almost boyish light danced in his eyes.

"You wouldn't want me to be shot at by your nephew, would you?"

"I'll see to that."

Though this might sound like a pleasant vagary on the part of Tu Chung, his face was drawn and there was no jocular tone in his voice. For he knew that the whole question of the lake property was sure to cause a wide rift in the family, and his brother was not going to yield easily. Azal and Hijaz knew it, too.

As they went up the slope towards the house, the younger people lagged behind. Jo-an asked Tantse: "What are you doing now?"

"I take care of the horses for Sohrab's family."

"Do you like horses?"

"I like them. Horses are like babies. They don't talk, but they come and sniff at you to be affectionate when you pat them and their round eyes look at you, and they want to speak though they can't."

Tantse pointed to the ruddy spots on the green lowlands and his eyes were bright. "There they are. Sometimes I take them up to Hochow for sale. They know it. They whinny and paw the ground and look at you with the whites of their eyes and nuzzle you and try to tell you that you mustn't leave them."

"Who was that girl you were talking with at the square?"

"That is Miriam, Sohrab's younger sister."

His face turned solemn. He broke a branch from a shrub. "I

think I am going to join the army. I shall be going away soon, perhaps in a week or ten days."

When the party straggled back to the house, the meal was being laid. Dishes of nuts and sweet cake were set on the low tables. On each table stood a steaming dish of roast mutton cut into thin slices, together with bacon and onion and liver, and pierced by small iron pins.

Jo-an saw the back of a young woman going inside. Nusaryi, the daughter-in-law, had prepared the dinner and she rushed off to change her dress, for she knew that Mr. Tu was the owner of the lake and that his daughter had come with him.

Some minutes passed before Nusaryi came out holding a steaming bowl of garnished rice between her hands. She set the big bowl on the low table and greeted the guests with a smile, revealing white, even teeth.

"This is Nusa," said Hijaz, looking at his daughter-in-law with pride in his eyes.

Nusaryi made a pretty picture in her green silk chemise and white silk bloomers. Over her head and shoulders lay a white muslin veil. She was a Khotandi, having come East in her teens. Al Hakim had met her at Hochow and taken her home as his wife. Without the shyness of a Chinese girl, she held her head high and darted a glance at Jo-an from her deep brown eyes. With quick gestures she asked the guests to sit down. Then she took a seat by Jo-an on the divan. She had learned to speak Chinese at Hochow, enough to say the common things, but she spoke it in a foreign accent without ever mastering the tones of Chinese words.

"We haven't time to slaughter a lamb in your father's honour. This is just what I got up on short notice."

The rice was the distinguished dish at Mohammedan tables. It was called *balai*, fried with curry and mutton and bits of bacon, garnished with chopped onions and carrots, and moistened with a brown sauce.

Li Fei listened attentively while Azal led the conversation, talking about the war. Ma Chungying was the man to save the Turki world from destruction. The war, which had been going on for about a year, was, in the words of Sven Hedin, the Swedish explorer, "the bloody war which made a desert of Sinkiang from 1931 to 1934." Azal's talk jarred on Jo-an's ears.

Ma Chungying had recently been made a commander of the Chinese army, but he was a leader of the Chinese Moslems, and he was going to fight on the side of the Turkis against the soldiers of the Chinese governor. In that remote corner of the world the situation was complex. The Turkis were fighting for their land and against the Chinese governor in a local war, which was separate from anything happening in China's interior.

Tu Chung sat through the meal without a word, leaving the talk to Hijaz and Azal, while his mind was occupied with his own problem. He had come with the purpose of studying the local situation and to see what could be done. While standing under the dam, he had seen how simple it would be to break it. He knew how angry his brother would be if he had the dam torn then and there. But he knew also how useless it would be to try to bring Fanglin around to his point of view. The decision was up to him, whether to do it or not.

Abruptly he asked Azal: "Can you get two dozen men together after lunch?"

"What do you want them for?"

Tu Chung said simply, yet with a tone of finality: "I am going to break the dam."

All conversation stopped and eyes turned towards the old man.

"I owe it to your people here. That dam is not going to stand there cutting off the water from them on account of a few fish. It will be broken some day, I know. It is better for me to break it than for you."

Azal's eyes glinted in amazement. He had been wanting to bring up the subject, but he had not expected Tu Chung to decide so quickly and simply. He felt as if a heavy load had been lifted from his heart and he muttered to himself: "Allahu akbar, Allah be praised." Then he exclaimed: "You have decided."

"Is it not simple? Get two dozen village hands out and I am sure we can do the job in an hour."

A murmur of excitement ran through the company. Hijaz said: "The whole village will turn out as soon as they hear the news. The people down below will have to be warned, too. I can get the men whenever you want to."

Tedja, the boy of five, danced about in excitement. "I am

going to tell them. When?" He tugged at his grandfather's coat-tails impatiently.

"The men are at their lunch. We must give them an hour. Tantse, you take the horse and warn the farmers in the lowlands."

Tantse's eyes flashed with delight. He went out of the house, untied the horse and swung into the saddle. They saw him ride rapidly towards Sohrab's house.

"I will sound the horn for the town," said Azal.

When the horn was sounded from the tower a crowd quickly gathered in the square. Azal explained to the people what Tu the Elder had decided to do. A fever of excitement swept through the listeners.

"Break the dam! Break the dam!" The word passed from house to house, and soon the whole village, men and women, old and young, poured out of their houses and converged towards the bank.

Galloping back from the valley, Tantse saw a black stream of people moving up the bank, while a darker knot of people surrounded Hijaz's house.

Azal had taken charge. There were too many volunteers.

He selected some twenty men provided with hoes and sickles, rakes and poles. He divided them into two teams and made Tantse leader of one team and Hijaz leader of the other. The crowd thickened while Azal stood on the porch steps with Hijaz and Tu Chung.

It made Tu Chung immensely happy to look into the faces of the men and women. The sullen looks had disappeared and the enthusiasm was unrestrained. Some women were trying to hold back their tears. As Azal introduced Tu Chung, there were shouts of applause and the clapping of hands. Two young men standing near the steps began to beat kettledrums as if they wanted to smash them. Older men touched their chests and bowed to Tu Chung, and he acknowledged with a bow.

Azal gave his instructions. "Tantse, your team work on the other side, and Hijaz's team will work on this side. Spread yourselves out and do not rush, and do not crowd each other. Make a breach in the middle and work towards the sides. When all is ready, I shall sound the drum thrice and at the third stroke you start. And don't lose your heads."

The men filed down towards the river-bed and then climbed up the embankment while the crowd stood some way off and watched in tense expectation.

The men had come to the middle of the dam. Hi-jaz's big husky figure was seen above the rest. The drum was struck and the men spread out and took up their positions. At the third signal those in the middle began to chop off the bamboo strips with sickles and hoes and, when these were loosened, others prised out the boulders with rakes and poles.

A shout went up from the crowd when the first boulder was seen tumbling over the dam. More boulders were prised loose and crashed down. The water-level was reached, a breach was made, and the water began to gush over. With shouts and merriment, poles and rakes were set to work to help the water roll the boulders down. Now a torrent splashed into the river-bed below.

The workers retreated from the breach in the centre and began to cut the other hampers on the sides. While many were shouting and clapping their hands, others' faces were solemn as they watched the water rushing in a silver stream which meant life to their fields and their animals.

Tu Chung was standing with Jo-an and Li Fei by his side, his eyes glistening.

"I am surprised these farmers put up with it for so long," he said. "I am glad it is done now."

Now as the breach steadily widened, the overflowing water increased in speed and volume, roaring over the rocks, large and small, and hurling them down with a rolling, continuous thunder. The water swept in all directions, forming pools and little streams. The river-bed was filling up. There was a difference of seven or eight feet between the lake surface and the river-bed below. The lake was some fifteen miles in circumference, and the level would go down very slowly. As more and more breaches were made, the water gathered in fury, churning and swirling as it swept over the broken dam, forming white foam and wetting the workers on the embankment with misty spray. Fish were seen leaping into the stream below. The water, carrying swiftly-floating bubbles, was turbid and yellow with the stirred-up mud and dust of the river-bed, yet to the farmers it was the most blessed sight their eyes had seen for years. The

old water-level was still traceable by the brown and grey marks on the banks. The river, like a starved animal reduced to its skeleton, had suddenly filled up and come back to life. A few turtles, unconcerned with all that was happening, were seen floating on its surface, happily exploring new scenery. Dogs barked and ran about in excitement.

An hour of this work passed easily. Now only the concrete posts stood like the skeleton of the dam with the water swishing past them. The river rushed towards the valley below like the onrushing of a spring tide.

Their work done, the workers began to come down. The team on the opposite bank had to make a long detour and cross the stream far below. Hijaz came back, running a black kerchief over his face and hair, and stood watching the river with great satisfaction. Luckily there had not been a single mishap. Men and women happy of heart began to return to their houses, and Tu Chung, walking up with his daughter and Li Fei, was happy with the thought of something accomplished.

Coming to the porch, Hijaz gazed towards the north. "It will take hours for the river to fill up to its old level," he said. "Tomorrow morning I shall stand here and see a glistening river running through that village as it used to. It will be like a dream of the old landscape come back again. You must come over and see it tomorrow."

They were ready to go home when Tantse came galloping up to the house. Tu Chung looked at the boy he had picked up as an orphan and said: "Tantse, I am glad to see you grown and doing so well."

Tantse grinned broadly. "Thanks to you, Mr. Tu. If it had not been for you, I would not be living today."

They said good-bye to Hijaz and his family and went out with Azal and Tantse. At the square, Azal left them with profuse thanks. Faces smiled at them as they passed. Tantse went with them to the shore below the cliff where they took their boat over to the Sunganor house.

Tantse stood on the shore and waved to them until their boat disappeared in the distance.

THE NEXT DAY THEY WENT ACROSS AGAIN. DURING THE NIGHT the water had flooded the old river-bed, filling it almost up to the grassy banks. They heard that some pigs, digging at the roots in the swamps, had been drowned, but there had been no other accidents. The islets in the river were now partly submerged. The water, after having sought its normal level, was winding its way peacefully, glittering in the sun. Some men and boys were standing on the banks with hook and line. Women stood at their cottage doors watching the green water swirl past as it had done before. Even scenically the valley had changed overnight. Farmers were out digging ditches to guide the water into their vegetable fields.

Tu Chung was very happy. What he had done seemed so right that he did not even think of the opposition he was bound to meet from his brother.

It was a great day in the village, the day before Jo-an was to return to college. Azal had brought half a lamb to Hijaz's house to celebrate, and some villagers had killed chickens and brought them as an expression of their gratitude. Tantse came and sat with Jo-an under the maple tree and talked.

When Hijaz heard that Li Fei was going north to see Ma Chungying, he wrote a letter of introduction to his son Al Hakim, who was working in General Ma's office. In the letter Hijaz told his son what had happened in the village, and asked him to do everything he could to help Li Fei.

* * * * *

It was their last night at Sunganor. The next day Li Fei and Jo-an were to depart for Tienshui, whence Li Fei would go up to Lanchow and Jo-an would go back to Si-an.

After supper, in the Sunganor house, Tasao had removed the dishes and the three of them were sitting round the table. Tu Chung took out his pipe. He saw Jo-an wink at Li Fei and Li Fei's face change and become serious.

"Uncle Tu, I am going far away on this trip. I have had the luck to meet your daughter, and, if you approve, I should like to

have the honour of being related to you. My family is not rich, as you know, and I am unworthy of such a distinguished girl as Jo-an, but I hope I may have your consent."

Li Fei spoke formally but naturally, less nervously than he had thought he would, because Jo-an had already told him that her father would approve.

Tu Chung looked at him and at his daughter's smiling face and then said with a gleam in his eye: "Li Fei, I have only this daughter and I have been very careful about choosing a son-in-law. But I believe we can all be happy together. My daughter's happiness is my own, and she likes you, as I can see."

There was pride and exultation in Jo-an's eyes. Li Fei squeezed her hand under the table and said: "I hope I shall prove worthy of her."

"Thank you, Father," said Jo-an. "You make me very happy."

"I congratulate you both," said the father. "Jo-an, I think you have chosen a good man and my heart is at ease." He turned to Li Fei: "There is something I want to speak to you about, now that you are to be related to my family." His eyes rested on them both.

"My ancestor left this heritage for us two brothers. Jo-an will naturally inherit half of this property. We have kept it together because I was away and my brother had been running the business. Sooner or later, there will be conflicts and I am afraid the property will have to be divided. I cannot live for ever with you and I want you clearly to understand the situation. You might think what I did about the dam was a whim of the moment. I did it to carry on my ancestor's policy, and for another weighty reason. This lake house will not be safe to live in if it is surrounded by hostile people. I have gone to great lengths to see that there is peace and harmony between us and the Mohammedans. You must remember these words of mine when I am gone. No family can go on prospering if it violates the laws of the human heart. The greatest plans of men go awry when they sin against the laws of heaven and of the human heart. As I desire a good future for my daughter and the Tu family, so I desire that the Mohammedans live contentedly, that we Tu family do not betray the tradition of our ancestor. So long as we live at peace with our neighbours I have nothing to fear."

"I shall remember your words," answered Li Fei. "But I

think the question of the lake should be settled now between you and Uncle."

Tu Chung blew out a puff of blue smoke. "I am going back to Si-an in a short time. Another thing, though: I have no son and there will be no one to carry on my branch. I shall ask you, in consideration of the fact that Jo-an is my only child, that her first son bear the name of Tu, to continue my line."

"Certainly," answered Jo-an and Li Fei together.

Tu Chung sat back in his chair and relaxed. "Then I am satisfied. I may have the last laugh over my brother. Tsujen has no son and, for all his bombastic cleverness, he is no match for Chunmei. She has more sense and wit. Jo-an, I advise you to go along with Chunmei. The Tu future may lie in the hands of you two women. If you two try to keep the Tu tradition, there is hope yet for our family."

"Why, what do you think will become of Tsujen?"

"I am afraid he will come to an untimely end. He has *shachi* on his face."

Jo-an was shocked. "Father, do you really believe in physiognomy?"

"I do. His muscles are horizontal and there is cruelty in his eyes. What is in one's mind shows in one's eyes. A man of violence will die by violence. Ten years from now you will remember my words. When my brother is gone, Chunmei and her sons will carry on my brother's branch."

That night Tu Chung wrote a long letter to his brother, telling him what he had done and informing him that he would soon be coming back to discuss the family affairs. He would go back to the lamasery now, but would be coming back at about the time of Jo-an's graduation.

Early the next morning they had breakfast and made ready. Jo-an was dressed for the journey.

"Take down your scarf," said the father. "We will go up and pay our respects to the ancestral tablets. And if Li Fei will come up with you and bow with us before the ancestral tablets, I shall consider you engaged." He surveyed the young man, "Have you no *makua* to put over your gown?"

Li Fei replied that he had not prepared for such a formal occasion and had not brought his jacket.

"Never mind," said the father. "Reverence is in the heart."

He led the way up the steps to the ancestral temple. His face was solemn as he halted at the door and saw that their dress was in proper order. Li Fei saw the ancestors' spirit tables carved with raised gilt letters bearing the grandfather's and grandmother's titles and names. Jo-an and he instinctively spoke in low whispers and stepped noiselessly as they saw Tu Chung light two candles on the dust-covered altar. Tu Chung asked them to stand a little behind him, Jo-an on his right and Li Fei on his left.

They bent down on their knees and prostrated themselves on the ground and kow-towed three times. After a silent moment, Tu Chung rose slowly and the younger ones followed him. He put a hand on the young man's shoulder, his lips compressed into a thin line, and said: "And now we are a happy little family. When you come back from Turkestan, we shall hold your wedding." He stroked his white beard contentedly.

There was beautiful joy on Jo-an's face as they came out to the porch. Jo-an wound the purple scarf over her head again. She had thought she might weep at the parting with her father, but he had promised to come back home. Li Fei held out a hand to help her mount her pony and then climbed into the saddle himself. The father stood below the magnolia tree in the misty morning. A distant sadness came to his eyes, but his face was smiling.

The dew was still on the hedge as they went. The morning sun's diffused light shone through thin clouds overhead. Woolly layers of fog lay over the lake and its banks so that the rocks seemed to rise out of a white sea. On the meadows pearly drops of moisture glowed, making the grass greener and the buttercups a deeper yellow than when the sun was shining on them. Chimney smoke from the fishermen's houses curled and-hung idly in the air. But over at the top the jagged rocks and the fine lines of the trees against the sky were clear and distinct.

In ten minutes they were up at the eastern ridge below the tsingo tree. They looked back towards the Sunganor house. Although they could not see clearly, they knew that the father was watching them from the eastern porch, and they waved a parting signal.

Tu Chung stood on the porch and watched the two distant figures ride off behind the ridge, and his heart was content.

The young lovers rode as far as Changshien to catch the bus for Tienshui. But when they arrived the morning bus had left, and they must wait for the afternoon bus, which would not leave until three o'clock. While they were having a hot lunch in the inn, the sky suddenly darkened and a heavy downpour began to pound the roof, and spray came through the shop front and the crude windows. They sat on hard benches at a bare table.

Now that they were alone again, Jo-an thought of themselves only. The excitement of their stay in Sunganor and of seeing her father was over. In her heart she was conscious of only one thing, that the hour was steadily drawing nearer when Li Fei had to go far away. It was their last day together. Then, too, she was weighed down with those vague perceptions of her future destiny which a girl feels on the day of her betrothal. Her womanly instinct went further than her reasoning. What her father had said the previous evening about the future of the family remained in her mind. She pictured her coming wedding; of its date she had no idea. She had never regretted what she had done in giving herself to Li Fei wholeheartedly, and she already felt like a woman whose whole future was wrapped up with the man she loved. Her eyes seemed darker as if, through the irises, she could see and feel with her whole being the mysteries of life, timeless and ageless, as so many women had felt before her.

"What are you thinking of?" Li Fei asked once more, cupping her hand tightly in his.

Her fingers closed on Li Fei's and she answered: "Nothing."

They looked out of the window. Drops of water were racing down the panes, but the shower had stopped. To be sure of good seats, they went to the bus station and stood waiting in the open on the wet unpaved ground. As soon as the bus arrived and the incoming passengers had alighted, Li Fei and Jo-an clambered up and were lucky enough to find two seats in the middle. Even the standing room filled up. It was a two-hour ride. Jo-an felt drowsy and rested her head against Li

Fei's shoulder, regardless of the other passengers. The bumps and turns and the grinding of gear shifts constantly woke her up.

Li Fei, his arm over her shoulder, had only one feeling, that he was sure that if he went to the ends of the earth he would not find another girl like Jo-an. He, too, thought of their parting and his trip to Sinkiang, but these did not worry him. He had the habit of laughing over obstacles and setbacks, of minimising dangers, and of using his intelligence to confront anything that might come his way with an inborn and abounding optimism.

Tienschui, guarding the centre of communications of the Kansu province, was a straggling city of old forts, built out of five old towns strung out on the bank of the Wei River. Through it came the busy traffic of wool and hides from Lanchow and tea and textiles from Si-an. The population was mainly Chinese, although a great many Mohammedan traders were found here. The houses were so closely huddled together that some were built into part of the old city walls and partly covered them.

Li Fei and Jo-an registered at a hotel in the centre of the city under an assumed name, out of caution. Tienschui was full of travellers from Si-an and he did not want his whereabouts to be revealed. They took two adjoining rooms facing the river. They could see Mohammedan women washing laundry on the bank. Soon it started to drizzle. The raindrops rippled the river surface and the boatmen pulled out plaited bamboo mats to cover their boats. Li Fei and Jo-an stood pressing their faces against the window and stared out into the dusk settling over the land.

"Shall we go out and have a good hot bath?" Li Fei asked. "The Moslem baths are very clean. It will make us warm again."

"As you like," replied Jo-an as if she had no will of her own. "But it is raining."

"We'll borrow an umbrella from the hotel. There must be a bath-house near-by. Then we'll find a good restaurant."

It seemed that every act they did together now had a special meaning, for this was their last night together.

Downstairs they borrowed a big oil-paper umbrella from the desk and the clerk directed them to a good bath-house three

blocks away. Li Fei held the umbrella with an arm around her shoulders, as they splashed over the pebbled streets, guiding their steps clear of the puddles by the lights of the shops.

Inside the Moslem bath, with its coloured tiled walls and mosaic floors, a woman came and led Jo-an to the women's section. Jo-an had never been to a public bath before and it was novel and interesting to her. When they met again in the lobby, she felt refreshed and had recovered her spirits. Her face glowed with youthful radiance and the sadness had gone out of her eyes.

Li Fei opened the umbrella and held it ready for her.

"You tipped the man a five-dollar note!", she said. "He must think you are crazy."

"Did I?" Li Fei often did things absent-mindedly. "Never mind. It is good luck. Anything we do tonight must be for good luck."

The slanting rain wetted the lower parts of their gowns while the drops pattered crisply on the oil-paper umbrella, but they felt comfortable and warm underneath. The shops were putting up their shutters for the night, but the cigarette shops and eating-places were still open. Now and then a well-covered rickshaw passed them, the barefooted puller sloshing along the wet street at a walking pace.

Electric lights shining over the kitchen front of an old restaurant invited them in. Leeks, roast and fresh pork, and boiled chickens hung on large hooks, and trays of minced meat and pig's knuckles were displayed near the entrance. The clang of utensils against the deep iron cauldron, the sound of bubbling soup, and the rising steam made their stomachs gurgle with anticipatory pleasure. The cook, in a greasy black apron, greeted them with a loud hearty "Come in!" The mud floor at the entrance was slimy, but the air from the kitchen was warm.

Through an enclosed corridor they passed into the inner house, where six or seven rooms opened on a central passage. All the rooms were occupied except one at the end. The grey soiled cloth curtains over the doors permitted occasional glimpses of the guests inside.

The waiter lifted the curtain of the last door for them to go in. Some loud-voiced guests were talking over their drinks in the next room separated from theirs only by a greyish-green

partition, but they did not mind. The floor was paved with large old tiles and the room was warm and dry.

Jo-an said: "I'm so hungry I'll eat anything. But let's have something very special. This is my farewell dinner for you, and I want to pay for it."

Li Fei sat down and wrote their order—turtle cooked with wine and garlic, hard-fried gizzard, some chicken rolls, fried fresh peas and 'paper-wrapped chicken', consisting of slices of chicken, each piece wrapped in a folded butter-paper and boiled in oil. The waiter recommended 'nine-twisted intestines' of pork. He explained that it was a dish of the small pork intestines that had been boiled previously and left cold overnight to harden, and then plunged into hot sizzling oil and served with its original soup.

Warm Shaoshing was served. As Jo-an sipped the wine, Li Fei said: "Do you remember the first time we had dinner by ourselves at the restaurant opposite the railway station, and were almost strangers to each other? And it was raining, too."

"That was the second time," Jo-an corrected him.

"Oh, yes, I forgot." Li Fei took the tips of her white fingers and bent and kissed them.

The waiter came with the big bowl of intestines. They came in short stretches, tied into knots, swimming in a creamy soup. Rich and crunchy and tender, each knot seemed to make a large morsel which melted in the mouth and filled the cheek with its velvety succulence.

"It is delicious," remarked Li Fei, "but it should not have such a sad name." The phrase, 'twisted intestines', was much used in sentimental poetry, expressing the sorrows of parted lovers. As Jo-an looked at the knotted morsels, they seemed aptly to symbolise her own twisted and entangled emotions.

"The name is good," she said. "It is poetic and sad at the same time." She picked up a knot with her chopsticks and gave it to him, saying: "When you are gone, remember that my thoughts and feelings will be tied up into little knots like these."

"I shall live for the moment when I see you again," said Li Fei. "I haven't yet even given you a ring, but I shall write to my mother and ask my family to make a formal exchange of presents. And you must go and see my mother."

"I will. But how am I going to write to you?"

"I don't know yet. Sinkiang, after all, is eight hundred miles away, and shut off from the rest of China. But the mail still comes through by the Eurasia planes. They fly between Urumchi and Lanchow once a week. I shall of course write you and let you know."

"Anyway, I shall read your dispatches in the *Sinkungpao*."

"If they get through. The mail is heavily censored, I know."

"How long do you think you will be gone?"

"It all depends. Sinkiang province is a thousand miles east to west; it is a world by itself."

She paused a moment and then said: "If conditions are good, I might even join you. Our child might be born in Sinkiang."

"Our child?" It was a question which had not even remotely entered his mind. She glanced at him in surprise at his surprise, and then looked away.

"We won't expect to have a child yet."

"No." She did not say anything more.

The sense of fatherhood is a cultivated feeling bred in human civilisation, but the sense of motherhood is eternal with nature. The momentary reference to a child passed over his mind but did not go into his inner consciousness, and he said simply: "It would be wonderful if we could spend a year together in that fabulous country. I hear it has a wonderful climate, with beautiful grapes and melons. People think it is a desert, but it isn't. In some parts the natives wash gold from the river. Most of the better-to-do families have a few cattles of gold at home. That is why you hear of the golden roofs of the lamaserics of Kumbum and Labrang. It is such a rich country."

Jo-an smiled at the enthusiasm in his eyes. Yes, Sinkiang was a rich, fabulous country. All that Li F'ei said he had heard and read was true. But he had an idealistic mind, and he imagined the people of Sinkiang as eating sweet, juicy grapes all the time, and all the sands as glittering gold. Although he knew there was the Gobi desert between the farthest Kansu border and Hami, he did not know that there were also long stretches of sand dunes where nothing grew and lizards were the only form of life, that there were briny swamps and shifting lakes and buried cities, and storms of flying stones and dry, parched

valleys. But men have always been attracted by the unknown. And Jo-an understood the restlessness of Li Fei's spirit. She had known it from his writings and from the singular vivacity on his face the first day she saw him. And she had that age-old feeling, unshaken by her modern education, that woman's place in life was to stay at home and wait, abide and endure.

"Their women are beautiful, too," said Li Fei rather abstractedly. "The Fragrant Concubine of Emperor Chienlung came from there, from a town near Kashgar." The Fragrant Concubine was the wife of a Turki chieftain. Her white flesh was supposed to emit a special fragrance unknown to the Chinese. Her husband was defeated in battle and was beheaded, and Emperor Chienlung had her brought to Peking, where she pined for her home. The emperor had a complete Turki village built outside her palace to cure her homesickness. But she preferred to die in loyalty to her husband.

Jo-an's eyelids flickered. "Did she really have especially fragrant skin?"

"I suppose the Turki women have a strong body odour different from Chinese women."

"I suppose it is like *hushiu* (foxy odour) that some Chinese women have. Do you like foxy odour? I don't."

"Don't destroy one of my illusions," he said. It was completely remote from his mind that she was manifesting a feminine fear. He was only being enthusiastic about Turkestan.

"China's most brilliant poet Li Po came from Sinkiang, too."

"No! Li Po's family came from here, where we are now."

"That was his remote ancestry. Li Po probably had Turki blood or Greek blood in him. A hundred years before he was born his great-grandfather was exiled to Suyab in Central Asia, on the Talas Muren River, beyond the Sinkiang border, near Afghanistan. Suyab is in what is now known as Tokmak, in Soviet territory. For three generations the family lived there. Li Po was born there in the year 700, and when he was a child of five his father fled and returned with him to China. I am quite convinced he had a Turki mother since his father and grandfather lived and married there. All these facts are recorded in his official biography."

"Perhaps that was why he had that restless expansive spirit. Children of mixed blood are usually more brilliant."

"Perhaps. Anyway, the story was that his name Li was given him after he came back to Szechuen."

So they sat and talked long over their dinner. When they went out at last, the drizzle had stopped and the streets were dimly lighted.

When they entered the hotel, the clock was pointing to nine. Jo-an resented it as she counted the hours remaining for them to be together. She must take the boat to Paochi early the next morning.

That night there were no stars. The moist wind from the western valley pounded at the river, whistling at the house-tops and rattled the windows. From time to time, they were awakened by the beating of the rain on the window-panes.

Jo-an felt sad and weak. She clung to Li Fei because she knew that in the time to come she would have need of great strength to bear his absence, a loneliness which neither her father's presence nor Tangma's company could make up for. That strength had to come from the memory of a great love.

The grey dawn had hardly broken over the city when she got up and lighted the candle. Outside the country was pervaded by a dim, aqueous light that submerged everything in neutral shades and woolly shapes. The forests on the distant hills appeared as darkly moulded patches, and the sky itself was only a lighter shade of grey, giving no promise of a sunny morning. Li Fei was still peacefully asleep. She began packing her little luggage. At six o'clock she waked Li Fei and rang for hot water and breakfast.

In about an hour they would have to go down to the boat. She wanted Li Fei to see her happy and cheerful, and all this time she chatted and helped him. They sat talking a few minutes after their breakfast. All the things they had said were gone over again. Li Fei was to be careful and to write often. Jo-an was to keep herself busy and see his mother and write to him all the news about his family.

"If ever you should need help, remember that Wenpo and Jushui are my best friends. They will be glad to do anything for you in my absence."

The porter came up and took Jo-an's luggage. Li Fei went with her to the river. It was already broad daylight. The day was cloudy, but it was not cold and the wind had stopped. On

the junk Li Fei saw that she had a good place to lie down during the voyage, and he waited until the other passengers had arrived and the boat was ready to leave. Then he went down the gang-plank and stood on the bank while the boatmen were untying the hawsers. Jo-an stood at the bow with a brave smile. Then she abruptly turned and went inside before the boat actually moved because she did not want him to see her tears.

Silently, and with a heavy heart, Li Fei walked up the bank alone.

Book IV

THE DISOWNED

19

LANCHOW WAS ONLY A DAY'S TRIP FROM TIENSHUI. THE BUS passed through the gap of Kaolan mountain and descended upon the plains of the Kansu capital. The sun was smiling upon the big city with its massive dark grey walls girdled by wide moats. The suburbs looked like a natural fruit orchard, with pear trees all over. Two tall chimneys, belonging to a woollen textile factory as old as General T'ao Tsungtang, were the only signs of modern industrial life. The city nestled at the foot of North Pagoda Hill, a long line of red peaks now covered in spots with green. A big iron bridge spanned the turbid Yellow River which skirted the hills. The Yellow River formed the northern border of the city and was in past centuries the natural defence against Turks and Huns. It was here that the Chinese general defeated the Huns almost two thousand years ago, and four 'bonfire towers', which served as military signals in times past, still stood on the summits on the south bank.

The bus took its passengers directly to the square outside the Kaolan Gate of the inner city, the centre of the town. Lanchow had double city walls, the outer wall having been built around the original one, as the city grew in importance and the population multiplied. The busy shops were along a few streets leading to the bank of the river, for Lanchow was the trade centre between China proper and the borderland provinces. But unlike the crowded cities of the interior, the houses in the residential section were spread far apart with long, low walls, revealing fruit trees inside. Li Fei took a rickshaw and went straight to the hotel where he had stopped on his previous trip and where he had asked Lang to leave word for him. He found

that Lang had taken a room in the same hotel, but was not in now.

He went to the telegraph office to send telegrams, one to Fan asking him to convey the news of his arrival to his mother, and Jo-an, and another to his newspaper. He made some inquiries about flying to Urumchi and was told that bookings were full, and there was a long waiting list. People had been taken off the plane to give priority to government officials. Studying the map at the Eurasia Aviation Office, he was appalled at the great distances. Lanchow was about seven hundred miles from the Sinkiang border, and the Monkey Gap at the border was about a hundred miles of desert from Hami, and it was another three hundred miles to Urumchi, the capital. A hazardous trip with a caravan across the desert was a matter of ten days and a heavy undertaking in normal times; in times of war, with the fighting going on, it would be foolhardy to undertake it. Even if he had to wait weeks for a seat in an aeroplane, he would still make the journey sooner. He remembered that Jo-an had asked him not to take unnecessary risks, and almost felt like a married man. The image of her face, her voice and her laughter, remained with him as something gladdening and clinging and surrendering.

Back in the hotel, after writing some letters, he went to look for Lang.

No matter how Lang exposed himself to the wind and sun, his white face never tanned. He had a greenish tint on his face and, as he wore his hair long, it made him look older and sallow than he had looked at Si-an. The constant moving of the last fortnight, the effort of reaching O-yun's father in Tienshui, and the necessity of hiding her from the eyes of the police had been harassing, as well as exciting to him. It was more like an adventure than anything he had known in his life. His face had a slightly ruffled look.

"Why don't you get yourself a shave?" Li Fei asked. He thought the world owed Lang something. This man could not harm a fly. He wanted only his freedom and peace in some quiet corner of the world where he could have a home with a woman like O-yun, for O-yun symbolised the life he wanted to live. His whole point of view was so detached that he could not get angry about the war-lords' government or misgovern-

ment even though he was by nature most excitable and emotional; it was none of his business, and all governments were alike. All crows are black, Lang said.

"Has O-yun been good to you?"

A light came into Lang's eyes, and he smiled a wan, bitter smile. "O-yun," he said, "has so far allowed me to hold her hand. Proud as a queen. I did not have much difficulty in persuading her to come here. She says she is grateful to me a thousand times, and yet she would not let me kiss her. She is half a child and half a woman. She knows everything about men and women and love and romance, but she won't open her heart to me. She has made me lose face before her father. I said gratitude was not what I wanted from her. 'Friendship?' she asked. 'No,' I said. 'Then she said: 'Men are like that. What does he want but that thing below the waist? But I won't give it, even though he saved my life.' She said that right in front of her father. I felt embarrassed, but teased her: 'What do you mean by that thing below the waist?' She drew her forefinger across her cheek, and said: 'Shame on you! Who does not understand?' I put it to you, Fei, that this is unfair. I never took advantage of her. Her father at first questioned us and I swore it was God's truth. You understand Old Tsui. He would be glad if I did not behave as a gentleman and so would have an obligation to marry her. But he believed her when she said I was a real gentleman. I think his face showed a little disappointment.

"What did you talk about then?"

"You see it is like this. Her father sometimes purposely left us alone in that Sung home at Tienshui. I could not make love to her. I suppose she has heard and told so many love stories from her early teens that she made me feel as if I was acting in a drama when I made love to her. She let me hold her hand and treat her like a younger sister. That was all. Yet she is seventeen. There must be a soft spot in her heart, but I don't know how to touch it. She has this extraordinary fear of *kungtsenko'erh* (sons of the rich). Naturally her father is disappointed, but she has her own ideas about whom she wants to marry."

"So that's why you are stopping here?"

"I have found a house for them outside Tungyuanmen, a

quiet place with a nice vegetable garden, quite spacious. The owner is an old woman. Her son is living in Hankow, and she keeps only a room for herself. I intend to move in a few days. Of course the old woman does not know who O-yun is, but she liked her when she saw her and said she would be glad to do the cooking for us, seeing that there were so few persons."

"You don't think O-yun is being coy with you, to take advantage of you?"

Lang's face reddened, and he said emphatically: "No. What an insult! You don't know O-yun."

He said that O-yun and her father had saved up something and they could get along for a year. But for the time being O-yun could not appear in public, and they would be using up their savings. So when Lang offered to pay the rent, O-yun's father accepted, but O-yun said they would pay for their own food. Actually Lang had paid the expenses on their journey. Old Tsui had encouraged the arrangement. He had hopes that in the course of a short time he would have a regular son-in-law, so that all these arrangements were regarded as temporary.

It looked to Li Fei as if Lang would succeed because he had made up his mind. His father would hardly approve, but Lang did not care. The girl's naivety and spirit of independence had charmed him, contrasting sharply with the society ladies whom he had known in Shanghai. Her 'class' and lack of education did not mean a thing to him. "What does a man want in a wife?" he had said to Li Fei. "To put on a chiffon dress and purvey gossip and eat soft, spongy cakes and be afraid of bacteria and lie and cheat her husband?" He had, as a matter of fact, long before he met O-yun, made up his mind that he preferred to marry a country girl, unspoiled and unsophisticated. Why should he want a wife with a school diploma? O-yun did not walk like a school-teacher. She walked like a young girl. She was spirited, perhaps quick-tempered, but she was good company and she was young and gay and playful and was not afraid to swear. He had seen how she had dealt with the Manchurian soldiers in the train. That was a real slap. And she was naturally dramatic with her voice and gesture, and how she could burlesque the ladies on the stage! It was precisely that impishness plus her language of the street that fascinated him. It amused Li Fei to think that if her defence of her class

against 'gentlemen' was as strong and spirited as her defence of her chastity, his friend was going to have a pretty hard time wooing the maid. Still, he did not think that O-yun could defy nature. He thought if some day they could all live together, he with Jo-an and Jushui with O-yun, in some such pretty place as Lanchow, life would be almost ideal.

The news about Ma Chungying's movements were conflicting and uncertain. He was reported to have come back from the fighting area, and his headquarters was supposed to be in Suchow, some four hundred miles from Lanchow. He was in full control of the Kansu panhandle, which jutted far out over a stretch of seven hundred miles to the Turkistan border. Communications were difficult, and it would be a complete waste of time for Li Fei to undertake the long journey unless he was sure of Ma's whereabouts. He had booked his aeroplane reservation for the latter part of May and he was afraid to miss it.

Meanwhile there was much evidence of Ma's activities in Lanchow itself. Chinese Moslem recruits were constantly passing through the city. Horses were requisitioned and rations sent out by camels, mules, and carts. Whole hides of pigs and cows and horses, blown up and sealed, and tied together into a train, floated down the Yellow River, supporting huge loads of oats and barley and other supplies. This was the only form of water traffic here, and the long lines of swollen skins constantly arrived from Sining, the Mohammedan centre in Kokonor. The main road to Suchow, on the north of the river as far as the Shihlitien, was crowded with ragged foot soldiers, camels and cart-loads of supplies. News of the fighting between the Chinese and the Turkis seeped back with the refugees and returning soldiers, and, with the help of maps and some imagination, Li Fei was able to piece together a picture of the progress and send it to his paper.

He heard from Jo-an and wrote to her, telling her how he was enjoying his stay. He was enthusiastic about Lanchow and described to her the house where Lang and O-yun were living. Everything was cheaper and better in Lanchow. There were flowers all the year round. Some of the white glamour of the

pear blossoms, for which Lanchow was famous, was now gone, but peonies were coming into bloom in old Mrs. Chao's garden. The *nuanerhli* pears, plucked in autumn and kept all winter until their skins blackened, were velvety soft and juicy and rich in fragrance. Beef and mutton were cheap and excellent. Furs were cheap. The climate was dry and it was cool in summer, while in winter the surrounding mountains were a silvery world of glittering snow. Li Fei pictured Lanchow as a sort of paradise and suggested that Jo-an should visit it while Lang and O-yun were there. He sent her some photographs that they had taken together in the garden. He knew that Jo-an could not come now because her father was going home, but he left the idea in her mind that Lanchow was indeed a place worth visiting.

He told Lang that he and Jo-an were engaged, and, whenever her letters came, Lang and O-yun teased him about it, though of course he would never show anyone her passionate letters. The landlady took a lively interest in the young people staying at her house. She was a hearty woman, in good health in spite of her years. The young friends often went out to the mountains, and when they came back late in the afternoon Mrs. Chao had already cooked their dinner. It seemed a very happy household indeed.

Old Tsui and Lang had both begged the help of Mrs. Chao in changing O-yun's mind. Lang had offered a settlement of two thousand dollars for the girl's father, a very considerable sum for his security in old age.

When Mrs. Chao had an opportunity to be alone with the girl, she said: "What is keeping you from marrying Mr. Lang? He is a gentleman and is rich."

"That is it. He is so far above me."

Mrs. Chao's face wore a puzzled look. "I don't understand you. Many a rich family would be glad to have a man like Mr. Lang for their son-in-law. Don't you like him?"

"I like him, but marriage is another matter. He is not the kind of man I would like to marry and he is too old for me."

"What do you mean? He may be ten years older than you, but what difference does that make?"

"It is the way he looks at things. He has money and he never wants to do anything. His hands are so soft and he says he has no ambitions. Maybe I am too young to understand that. He

loves me, I know, and he is poetic. That is not enough. Look at Li Fei. He works for his living. I can see why Miss Tu likes him."

"What kind of a husband do you want?"

O-yun glanced quickly at her. "I? Mrs. Chao. I have travelled a lot and mixed with all classes of people. The kind of men I admire are people like Li Shih-min and Shuch Jen-kwei, who can lead in battle and drag their enemies off the backs of their horses. I would not mind being like Lady Precious Stream, living in a cave waiting for such a man's return. They are not the average kind of men we expect to meet in this life. Next to them are those like Su Chin and Chang Yi, who can go out to an enemy camp and persuade the enemy to turn back by the power of their tongue. Those are called scholars who can save their country in times of trouble. But they are extraordinary people, and I have no such wild ambitions. I would not mind being a hunter's wife, whose husband goes out with bow and arrow and brings home a deer or a boar or pheasants, and I would pluck the feathers and dress the deer that my husband shot. There would be some pride in that. Or, to come down still farther, I would be glad to be a farmer's wife. I would get up early and prepare his breakfast and see him go out with a hoe upon his shoulders and I would take a lunch-basket to the field at midday. But I don't want to marry a merchant or an official or be the wife of a rich man who does nothing all day."

Mrs. Chao could not help smiling.

"You are young and you fill your head with those stories on the stage. When I was your age, I dreamed of the same kind of men. When you are as old as I am you will change your mind."

"Of course I am young, but that is the way I think. Mr. Lang is kind and gentle, but he is not what I think a husband ought to be. And I have the right to wait. Perhaps a swarthy hunter like Shuch Jen-kwei or a tiger-killer like Wu Sung may come my way."

"But even if you don't think of yourself, you ought to think of your father. One is lucky to have someone to support the old people and not worry about the three meals."

"I can support my father," O-yun replied.

"How can you?" Although O-yun had not concealed her

name, she had not told Mrs. Chao her profession, and the old woman thought that they were only refugees from Peking.

"I can," replied the girl simply.

So the days drew on. O-yun seemed to be the only completely happy person. She helped Mrs. Chao pick vegetables from the garden or in shelling beans. Dressed in cotton jacket and trousers, she carried a basket to the market in the morning with Mrs. Chao, chatting and joking with people. In the afternoons she sometimes went with her father and the others to the public amusement places, or tea-houses, where she mixed happily with the crowd. She would stand with them in an open square watching some boxers displaying their skill and selling medicines, or would attend bear shows and monkey shows and all varieties of itinerant entertainment. She would often go up to the entertainers and ask them where they had come from, talking the language of the 'rivers and lakes'. Then she was happy. There were few people who lived more literally from hand to mouth in day-to-day fashion than these boxers and entertainers, wandering from town to town without a home, and there were few who had less worry. Her father came to know a fellow called Lao Wang, who was a member of the White Lotus Society. While Lang did not mind all this and her father rather wanted her to be a 'lady', O-yun was more fearful of losing her 'class'. What really set her mind against marrying Lang was what she had told nobody, that she knew that after marrying Lang she would not be permitted to appear in public as a drum singer and would lose contact with this open life which she loved.

Looking at her bending over the vegetable garden, Old Tsui was still hopeful. "She is still a child," he said to Lang. "Her heart has not yet opened."

The more O-yun put him off, the more she tantalised Lang with her innocent charms and her carefree laughter. He was happy to see her every day and he was willing to be patient, trusting time and growing age to bring her closer to him.

* * * * *

A week before Li Fei was to leave Lanchow, he had the opportunity to see Hijaz's son, Al Hakim, the colonel in Ma Chungying's office. When Hakim came to Lanchow in connec-

tion with the recruits and supplies, he asked Li Fei to come to see him.

Li Fei walked into the Lanchow office of the commander of the Thirty-Sixth Division. Al Hakim, in his Chinese army cap and uniform and high leather boots, was a busy, tense, active young officer, about as tall as his father, his deep brown eyes and his thin, long, bearded face marking him off easily as a Turki. He rose and looked directly at Li Fei in a business-like, cordial manner.

"General Ma told me to do everything possible for you," he said. "He would be very glad to see you if you would come up to Suchow."

General Ma was an alert if impulsive and ambitious character, and he loved to talk to newspaper-men. When he was told of the intended visit of a correspondent of a national newspaper, he had authorised Hakim to bring him to Suchow.

Li Fei explained that he would like to go, but unfortunately he was booked to fly to Urumchi in a week.

"That is too bad. If you don't mind waiting for twenty minutes, I would like to take you to lunch."

Li Fei readily agreed. He was happy to have this direct contact with the Mohammedan army. The young colonel sat down at once and disposed of his papers with quick concentration. Then he rose, took his army overcoat in his hand, and went out of his office with Li Fei.

There was an aspect of Mohammedan hospitality which Li Fei had not known. Al Hakim had read in his father's letter of introduction about the breaking of the dam. When he learned that Li Fei had eaten in his father's house, he treated him almost as an old friend. His slight officer's dignity disappeared and a softness came into his eyes. He asked how tall Tedja and Ali had grown, how Nusaryi looked, and what food they gave him. When Li Fei spoke of the breaking of the dam, Hakim's eyes glared in keen concern.

"That is what General Ma is fighting about. We are not fighting the Chinese army. General Ma is part of the Chinese army. Out in Hami land was taken away from our people and they had to flee to the desert and the mountains. And now they are being massacred. Our people took up arms to defend themselves. Nusaryi wrote me about the dam and what was happen-

ing to our valley. Mr. Li, our people are a peaceful people. If I were there, I would have led the villagers to tear down the dam myself. I was happy to hear this news. Mr. Tu the Elder is a good man."

Hakim gave him news about the arrival of the Manchurian General Sheng Shih-tsai, who was fighting them, and General Ma's plans to help the Turki people. Li Fei told him about the recruiting of young men in his own village.

"Is General Ma going out to Turkestan himself?"

"No. He has this army to train. Ma Fu-ming and Ma Shih-ming are doing the active fighting. They are Chinese Moslems, but they have thrown in their lot with us. I will give you letters to our Moslem generals and to Yollbars Khan, the former minister to the king of Hami."

"I shall appreciate that. Shall I come to the office to get them?"

"It is not necessary, I will have them sent to you. I shall be going back to Suchow the day after tomorrow. General Ma will be sorry you cannot come to see him this time. Perhaps we can meet in Urumchi if you are still there this winter."

A week later, Li Fei boarded the plane for Hami.

20

JO-AN WAS WAITING HOPEFULLY FOR LI FEI'S EARLY RETURN. There is a kind of love in which a girl is incapable of thinking of herself and only of the man she loves. Jo-an's love was of that kind. Li Fei had wanted to go to Sinkiang, and she had let him go. There was justification for his going in that he could not, for the moment, come back to Si-an. She would wait cheerfully as long as she had letters from him and knew he was safe. She could not imagine what the world of Sinkiang was like, its great distances, its primitive and raw methods of tribal warfare. She was waiting for her father to do something to assure Li Fei's safety when he came back.

Since their parting, she had had eight letters from Li Fei, all from Lanchow. Every time she received a letter she read it aloud to Tangma. She had told Tangma that they were to be

married as soon as Li Fei came back, and her father had approved. In exultant tones she told Tangma how Li Fei had passed a poetry test set by her father. Tangma could not follow the poetry, but knew that it was something very difficult and worthy of respect because Jo-an's father was a *hanlin*.

Tangma would have guessed as much without being told, for on the girl's face she saw a new glow and a new seriousness, and Jo-an was often silent, staring into space. Pride was on her face, too, the pride of the possession of love which transforms a woman's look subtly but unmistakably. A girl who knows she is beloved is kinder and more naturally graceful and forgiving to everybody, because in being loved she has found herself. She has a will and a direction, a destiny in the real sense of the word, because she cannot be balked or frustrated. The love of a woman has a subtle power which governs her actions, her thoughts, her choices and alliances and hatreds, and sometimes that tenderest of emotions can be transformed into one of ruthless hatred.

The subtle alchemy of love wrought a change in Jo-an, in her moments of listlessness and moments of longing and moments of apathy towards all other beings in this world. Tangma was too close to her not to notice all this. She saw how Jo-an's eyes lighted up every time she came back from a visit to Li Fei's mother, as if in seeing her Jo-an had come closer to him.

Often Li Fei's letters made references to his mother and his brother's family, for he wrote more frequently to her than to his brother. So it came about that once a week she would have occasion to visit Li Fei's mother to tell her news of her son.

"When your father comes," said Mrs. Li, "we will formalise the engagement. It will make me happy to have an educated daughter-in-law like you. You must tell us what you want. We are not rich, but we will do the right thing."

Since coming home from Sunganor, Jo-an regarded Chunmei with her father's words in mind. Her father had said that she and Chunmei were eventually to bear the responsibility for the Tu house. She could not help admiring Chunmei, and their last talk together had made Jo-an see Chunmei's point of view. Jo-an wondered if what her father had said about her and about Tsujen would turn out to be true. She had no liking for Tsujen, and Tsujen knew it, felt it. Now especially she always mentally compared Li Fei with him to his disadvantage. The more she

looked at Tsujen's face, the more she saw his 'horizontal muscles', the pugnacious look in his face, and the *shachi*, 'spirit of violence', in his eyes. Tsujen had acquired a tense look even when he was at home and had nothing to do. So Jo-an felt close to Chunmei, was willing to let her know that she had made up her mind to marry Li Fei, and that her father had seen him and had approved.

When she returned from her vacation, Jo-an knew that there was going to be a serious rift between her uncle and her father. At supper the first evening they asked her how she had spent her vacation and how her father was.

"I have persuaded him to come back," she said. "He was living up at the lamasery. He had not even finished the ginseng we sent him at New Year because there was no one to stew it for him."

"What was his illness?" Tsaiyun asked.

"He had a spell of unconsciousness. The servant picked him up from the floor. I think that was his first attack. When he came back with us to Sunganor, he seemed quite well. And he went with us to the Mohammedan village."

"What do you mean by us?"

Jo-an realised that she had made a slip. "Ah-San," she replied. Her cheeks reddened a little and she caught Chunmei's quick glance at her. She thought of mentioning the breaking of the dam, but she did not know how to begin.

"Oh, yes," she said quickly, "my father has sent a letter for you."

The uncle unfolded the letter. It was two pages long in fine handwriting. He put his chopsticks down and began to scowl over the letter. He had gone over half a page before he threw it down. The family were frightened by the mounting colour in his face and the glitter in his eyes, white with fury. He pushed his chair back and rose. His eyes blazed and he looked as if he had been kicked in the vitals.

"So he broke the dam, did he? I knew he would do something foolish like that!" His panting was audible as he paced about the room.

"Sit down and finish your supper," said his wife.

"He hasn't a bit of common sense. Staying up with those lamas—why, he must be insane!"

Jo-an's face had blanched at first, but when her uncle insinuated that her father's mind had been touched, resentment rose in her. She checked herself.

"Why, he must be mad. To let all the fish from the lake escape down the river! The dam cost a lot of money to build. We made the lake make money for us. He sits up in a lamasery, does nothing but ask for money from me, and then tears down the dam without even consulting me first."

Jo-an could control herself no longer. "My father is perfectly sane. Why don't you read his letter?"

"Why should I read it? He doesn't mingle with people. He thinks Si-an is not good enough for him." He walked towards Jo-an. "Tell me, did you see it? Were you there when this thing happened?"

"Kungkung, you sit down," said Chunmei. "By and by you'll have a headache. If the dam is broken, it is broken already. You can discuss the matter with him when he comes home. I don't like to see you brothers dispute over a few fish. They are not worth it."

Chunmei had a way of putting it. The matter was unpleasant, but her manner was agreeable. Slowly Tu let himself down into his chair.

"Was the dam completely broken?" he asked Jo-an.

"Once the breach was made," she replied, "the water poured over and swept away the rest." Then she added with malice: "The Mohammedans are very happy to have enough water for their fields. The next morning I went over and the beautiful river was filled up once more. Farmers came out and began to repair their ditches and lead their horses to the banks, and the village boys were fishing. It made father so very happy."

Jo-an looked up at her uncle and inwardly gloated over the pain on his face.

"I think my father is thinking of the good of the family. He says that the dam was bound to be broken by the farmers, and it was better for him to break it than for it to be torn down by angry neighbours."

With a snort her uncle left the table and went to his room.

An hour later, having gone through the kitchen and put her children to bed, Chunmei came over to Jo-an's court. Jo-an

was lounging in bed, smoking a cigarette. She heard Chunmei's voice calling, "Third Aunt, you have not yet retired?" and saw her lift the curtain.

Jo-an quickly sat up as Chunmei sidled in.

"When you were away, I asked Tangma to sun your bedding as usual. The April weather makes everything mouldy."

"It was good of you to think of that. Come, sit on the bed, so that we can talk at ease. Do you know what my father said about you? He said that you are the one to hold the family together, and without you the Tu family will go to pieces. You and my father think alike about the far-away future of the family. I told him some of the things you said to me just before I went away."

Chunmei threw herself into the chair by the table. There was a wry smile on her lips, and her eyes were cast down in thought. A sigh escaped from her, barely noticeable.

"Did I say something wrong at the table?" she asked.

"Nothing that I noticed. Why?"

"I said that the two masters should not dispute over a matter of a few fish."

"Well?"

"I was taken to task for it. Popo said that I was presuming to talk of matters above my position. If I did say it, it was only to express my wish that nothing should break up the harmony in the family. When brothers quarrel, it is the first sign that a family is beginning to go down. I did say 'a few fish'. I did not mean that the fish were unimportant. You see how difficult it is in my position. It is wrong to say too much and it is wrong to say too little."

"What did my uncle say to you?"

"He said nothing. He just huffed and puffed. His face looked like a red steamed carrot. He is writing a letter to his brother. I dared not open my mouth any more, for fear Popo in the other room would hear it and say that I was interfering again. Third Auntie, when I heard that there was no one to make medicinal stews for your father, I thought that it was not right for him to stay up there, and I am glad that he is coming home. But I am worried that the matter is not going to stop here. I heard him speaking over the phone to his son, saying that he wanted to speak to him tomorrow—and he would have to re-

store the dam. You will see; when your father comes home there will be a storm. I have never been to Sungahor, so I don't understand. Is it so bad?"

Jo-an explained. "You don't realise what the dam means until you have seen the place. There is a whole valley inhabited by Mohammedans. Their farms and their pastures depend upon the river. The Mohammedans are angry, but they don't dare do anything. My father disapproves because it does not matter so much if we catch and sell a few less fish, but it is a matter of life and death to the farmers. The lake is big and there will always be plenty of fish in it without a dam. My father thinks it does not pay to have a hostile community around the lake. It is so far out in the mountains. There are no Chinese there except the fishermen under our employ. One cannot depend upon soldiers to protect the place by force. He thought my uncle would never agree to the tearing down of the dam, so he just went ahead and had it torn down. You should speak to my uncle and make him see it."

"I don't know if he will listen to me."

"He will."

"Not in such matters. We women are not supposed to understand these big things that concern business. We are not supposed to know anything except how to look after the babies and the kitchen." Chunmei smiled a wan, bitter smile. "But I do say this. One has to live and let live. Heaven's way goes around in a cycle."

"What do you think of Second Brother?" Jo-an was curious to know what Chunmei thought of Tsujen and whether or not she agreed with her father's opinion.

Chunmei looked up sharply. She could not help feeling that she was the mother of the younger sons, Tsu-en and Tsutseh, even as Aunt Tsaiyun was the mother of Tsujen. "If you had not asked, I would not dare to express my opinion. People might think I was jealous of the eldest heir of the family. I have always held aloof from him because of Sianghua. Now I agree with Sianghua. No one knows a person so well as his own wife."

Jo-an smiled a weary smile. She understood. Sianghua never had a good word to say for her husband.

"Men are like fish. Big fish are sometimes good to look at,

but are not necessarily good to taste," said Chunmei. "The same is true of marriages."

Chunmei had been a faithful wife—if one might use that word—to Tu Fanglin, but it would have been far-fetched to say that she loved him.

Jo-an coloured at the subject of marriage, as a young girl should, and Chunmei saw it. It was hard to conceal anything from Chunmei.

"Was there someone with you at Sunganor?" she asked, her eyes roguish. "I knew that when you said 'us' you did not mean Ah-San."

Jo-an's face went crimson in spite of herself. "There was somebody else," she replied. "Can you guess whom?"

"Didn't I have eyes? When you went away, you did not look as if you were just going to see your father. I knew that Li Fei had gone away from the city the night you went to the station. I put two and two together."

"What do you think of him? I ask you because he has asked my father for my hand and my father has approved." Jo-an tried to present her case as prosaically as she could. "I do not want to tell the family until my father has come."

"If you wish to wait I shall respect your wish, and I thank you for your confidence in me. I congratulate you. He is a bright young man and quite mature. Now I must go back. He will be waiting for me."

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For a month Jo-an lived in a state of continued expectancy. She did not write Li Fei about her private worries, because she did not want him to be worried on her account. She did have reason, however, to wish that they could be quickly married. She could not be certain yet. At first when her period was due but delayed, she was incredulous but hopeful. The nascent doubts worried her. The dim realisation of possible maternity was not without its sense of wonder. Had she been wrong to complete a love which was so full of beauty for her, which had given her so much happiness? She had thrown all other considerations out of the window when she gave herself to him that night at the Sunganor house, when she invited him to come to her room and look at the moonlight. In her glad

surrender she had only wanted to show how much she loved him. She was sure she would do it again in the same situation. It was a good thing her father had seen Li Fei and approved. If her father could speak for him and assure his safety in Si-an, Li Fei would not have to go away to Sinkiang, and they would marry. These thoughts she could tell to no one, not even Tangma or Chunmei. She wrote an urgent letter to her father asking him to return as soon as possible.

Then she heard that Li Fei had taken off from Lanchow. She read and re-read the letter. He was gone for several months, perhaps half a year. Her worry increased. She would wait and see what the following month brought. Weeks passed and she felt perfectly normal, which gave her rising hope. She heard that her father was coming two weeks before her graduation. She would soon know. She would then speak to her father and perhaps have to tell him a lie, that it had happened at Tienshui, after he had given his approval, on the night of their parting. She had a feeling that her father would understand and forgive her. Then she would ask him to declare that they had been married at Sunganor in a simple ceremony because Li Fei was going away. She would trust her father and tell him everything, and surely he would do the best for her.

Tangma was the first to notice her irregular behaviour and moods of silence. Jo-an put off her questions, or did not answer, and Tangma put it down to the fact that Li Fei had gone away. As Tangma saw the increasing dreaminess in Jo-an's eyes, she said: "I see you with your book open in your lap and you are not reading it."

Jo-an still stared distantly, not hearing her. Finally her eyes returned to focus, and she asked: "What were you saying?"

"You have that far-away look. If you have any trouble, you must tell me. You will think yourself ill if you keep on like this."

A sad smile came to Jo-an's lips. "I cannot help thinking, can I?"

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When Li Fei boarded the plane for Hami, there were only five civilian passengers, besides the military officers, who gave the impression of being on some important mission. All were Chinese except an old Turki in a white turban whose creased

and weather-beaten face was supported by a bushy white beard. When Li Fei spoke to him he said that he was a merchant from Hami. The war had caught him in Lanchow. He had heard of the terrible destruction of Hami and, now that the war had shifted to Shanshan and Turfan, he was going home to see what was left of his house and his family. His brows wore a clouded look and he spoke to nobody except when he was spoken to.

Beside Li Fei sat an officer who kept dropping a liquid from a medicine dropper into one of his inflamed eyes. The liquid trickled down his face and he sniffed aloud almost as if he was enjoying it. From his cap with the national emblem, a white star on a blue background, Li Fei knew that he was in the Chinese army, but he could not be sure which side he was fighting on. Ma Chungying himself wore such a cap. When Li Fei said a few words to him and told him that he was a newspaper-man, the officer looked at him sideways without moving his head. Blowing forceful sniffs through his nose, he said in a weary voice: "Why do you come here?"

"I want to see the war, and I have been wanting to see Sinkiang for a long time."

The officer made a gurgle in his throat, something between a snigger and a laugh.

"I don't see why of all places you choose to come to this hell-hole. It is easy to get in, but not so easy to get out."

"I don't see why."

The officer turned his head slightly to take a better look at his companion. "Then you don't know Sinkiang."

"I don't see why they should stop me."

"They will let you in all right," the officer said. "If you are attached to a Chinese army, that may be different. But out there we are fighting a war that has nothing to do with China or the Nanking government. Governor Chin thinks it is nobody's business but his own, and he does not welcome newspaper-men snooping about his private kingdom."

Li Fei dozed in his seat. When he woke, the sun was already shining upon buff, grassless plains, with great patches of shadow cast by the clouds below him. As far as his eyes could see there was not a sign of human habitation. Peering out of the window, he saw across the silver wing to his right the billowing white of the distant Tienshan range. In another twenty minutes blue

and red hills dotted with white villages swam rapidly past. The steady singing of the motors and the sight of the wings cutting the cold morning air with a vibration so smooth and steady gave him a pleasurable sensation of sailing in the sky. A steward came in to say that they were going down and were to hook on their belts.

The ground began to rise towards them, the horizon heaved and the earth itself appeared to keel over. Roads lined by poplars seemed to dance before his eyes. Then his eyes caught sight of the skeleton of a frontier town of gaping buildings with standing walls and hardly a roof intact. The city of Hami appeared now on one side and now on the other as the plane swept slowly round. In spite of what the officer had told him, Li Fei felt happy to have arrived safely.

A few dusty and loose-jointed soldiers with red badges on their chests shuffled about the airport office in their cloth shoes and puttees. In the outer room, where the passengers' papers were being examined, Li Fei filed towards an old man with a head of thinning hair, hunched over his desk. A middle-aged officer in a grey uniform strolled about, surveying the passengers. While the men in military uniform were having their papers examined, the officer came towards the old Turki standing in front of Li Fei.

"Who are you?" the officer asked.

"I am a resident here."

The officer uttered an ominous non-committal grunt, and his eyes followed the old Turki as he shuffled up to the desk. He had no papers.

The officer came up to him and demanded: "What do you come here for?"

"I come to look for my family. My home is here."

"You wait," said the officer grimly, and gave a snort. The old man obediently stepped backwards towards the wall, his face white and his body trembling.

It was Li Fei's turn. The man at the desk bent over his papers, turned them over and back again. He had never heard of the Sinkungpao. His face was completely expressionless as he stamped the papers and returned them. Li Fei moved on to where the officer was now supervising the search of the luggage by the soldiers. Li Fei realised that he had arrived at a war

town. There was not a smile on the soldiers' faces, everybody seemed to be in a bad mood, and the closed room stank.

A soldier tapped his hips and legs and then told him to empty his pockets. He took out his black wallet and a thin packet of letters. The soldier handed the letters to the officer, who opened them one by one. His face changed as he read. Hakim's letters bore the letter-head of the Thirty-Sixth Division. Shaking the letters in his hand, the officer scowled and said: "Do you know what this means? Do you realise that you can be shot for a Moslem spy? What is your business here?"

"I was sent out by the Sinkungpao. Naturally I wanted letters of introduction to the Moslem leaders as well as to the leaders on our side. There is nothing wrong. The Thirty-Sixth Division is part of our army."

The officer was not listening.

Flipping over the letters, he muttered to himself: "Ma Shih-ming, Ma Fu-ming. And Yollbars Khan! Where did you get these letters?"

"At the Lanchow office of the Thirty-Sixth Division. A friend of mine provided these letters for me."

"So you have friends in Ma Chungying's office!"

Li Fei tried to laugh it off. "Officer, you can't be serious. Colonel Hakim gave me these letters because I happen to know his family in South Kansu."

"I am afraid this is serious, very serious. Have you letters of introduction to Governor Chin or others?"

"No."

"Then I have to detain you until I hear from Urumchi. You realise there is a war going on and we do not tolerate spies posing as newspaper correspondents."

For the first time the officer showed a cold smile, baring this tar-coated teeth. "I don't know what you are, but if you are a regular newspaper-man and not in the service of Ma Chungying, you are certainly acting very foolishly. You have to trust in your luck, young man. Men have been shot here for less. I think you have an honest face, but there is not much I can do about it."

Li Fei's throat tightened. He found himself in a perfectly helpless situation. His first thought was of Jo-an and the worry

it would cause her if he should get into trouble. The other passengers had gone, except for the old man still standing alone in one corner.

"Come, follow me," said the officer. Li Fei was led away from the airport with the Turki and four soldiers following him. The streets were bare of people. Hami, a prosperous centre and the gateway to Sinkiang, looked like a ghost town. Here and there was a prowling dog. A group of soldiers was standing in a roofless house playing with a bleating lamb. Along the big canal were the hollow twisted trunks of old willow trees.

He was taken to a house with a stone door in a long plaster wall. It looked like a merchant's house, one of those that had escaped the pillage and destruction and was used partly as officers' quarters. The fact was that the city prison was the first building to be wrecked by the Turkis during the uprising, and then was completely destroyed when the Chinese came back.

"You will be our guest here until I hear from Urumchi," said the officer politely, but sternly.

Li Fei chafed and cursed under his breath. "Major, this is ridiculous. I was sent here to report on the war. You have heard of the Sinkungpao, I am sure. It is the biggest national paper. You can telegraph to Shanghai for confirmation."

"I have no doubt about that. But even if you were an emissary from the Nanking government, it would not make any difference. I am sorry, but I am carrying out my duty. We are not doing anything to you, but do not leave the house."

Li Fei asked that his letters be returned.

"You need not destroy them, because that won't help you."

"Why should I? I still intend to interview Yollbars Khan and the rest."

That night he lay on what had been the luxurious bed of a rich man, thinking of what he should do. After his arrival in the house he had had a long cross-examination about his family and his career. He heard that the old Turki was shut up in another room. It was very foolish of the Turki to have come. The Turkis who had not been murdered had all fled south to the mountains.

Li Fei's reflections were interrupted by footsteps. He listened and, in a few minutes, the footsteps returned from the end of the hall, accompanied by the soldiers' cursing, and he recognised

the voice of the old man whimpering for mercy. He heard sobs and the sound of clubbing by rifle butts, the panting of the old man and the scrape of dragging feet fading away. In another few minutes he heard a shot, and knew that the old Turki merchant was dead.

The shot, sharp and short, followed by the night's silence, was like a signal which animated his entire system and threw him into a state of alertness. The pumping of a lead bullet had something decisive about it. He had heard of the murder of masses of innocent civilians. The death of one more Turki probably did not mean anything to the soldiers. If this was war in Turkestan, it was unlike anything he had imagined or believed possible. Blood throbbed in his brain, as he leaned back on his bed and tried to be still and take stock of the situation. In the dark he fumbled for his packet of cigarettes, took one, and struck a match. In the light of the match he looked at his fingers. He crooked them before the match went out and thought how good it was to be alive, to be able to crook those fingers.

He had a sharp sense that he was caught in a complex situation where suspicions were deep and punishments swift and life cheap. His life depended on the whim of a commanding general, without much chance for an argument. Rather than wait to hear the reply from Urumchi, he should trust only himself and find means of escape. He thought the safest escape would be to join the Moslem fighters to whom he had letters of introduction.

He got up and stood before the window. A pale moon was hidden behind thin clouds. Beyond the high walls of the back yard he could see nothing, and he had no idea where he was. He went to the door and listened. The hall was silent. He remembered seeing very few soldiers in the streets; this was probably a temporary house of detention with only a few guards at the entrance. On coming into the room he had seen a passage, which must lead somewhere. He opened the door and lit a cigarette to attract attention. A guard sitting at the farther end of the hall came slowly towards him and asked what he wanted, and he begged to be shown the toilet. As he expected, the passage led down a few steps to a small low entrance in the back. He went in while the guard waited outside. The open

holes in the walls permitted him to see a little beyond the house. Only the tops of the roofless walls of neighbouring houses were visible.

Coming out into the back yard, he exchanged a few friendly words with the guard.

"What is your trouble?"

Li Fei laughed. "It is silly. I am on my way to see the governor. They are keeping me here until they get a confirmation from Urumchi. They will probably apologise to me when the word from the governor comes."

Li Fei took the chance to look about the yard in the moonlight before he bade the guard good-night, and went back into his own room.

His mind was made up. He had to make good his escape to the Mohammedan side. He was lucky to have got back Hakim's letters and they now seemed to him his most precious possessions, the means of his survival and his return to Lanchow. It would be foolish to attempt to escape alone across the desert to the east: his best chance was to go west and try to join up with the Chinese Moslems at Shanshan. If he got through, he should be able to work his way back by the south route by way of Korla and Chaikhlik, because he knew that many refugees from Sinkiang had come back that way. And he would be seeing a good part of Sinkiang, too. The thought was not without its quiet irony. What a reception he had on his first night in the province, and what a memorable trip it would be! It might take him weeks to reach safety on the Mohammedan side, but he had hopes that as soon as he saw Ma Shih-ning he would be able to send word to Jo-an.

He quickly made a package of his clothing, his money, a detailed map, and his five packets of cigarettes, and used his raincoat as a wrapper, tying it up with its long sleeves into a bundle. Then he jerked out the belt and made the bundle secure, leaving a long end to strap across his back.

The moon stood in the middle of the sky. He got up stealthily, listened, and noiselessly opened the door. The light at the farther end of the hall had been put out. Quickly he stepped into the passage and out into the back court. The night was a little raw but windless. Throwing his bundle to the top of the out-house, he studied the situation. If he could get

up to the tiled roof without noise, he could crawl over the wall to the neighbouring house. Raising his arms high, he could barely touch the roof with his elbows. He could not be sure that the thin tiles would not slip and crack under his weight and waken the guards. He thought of going in again to get a chair, but this meant going through the passage again. In the dim light he saw a dark, long object lying in a corner. When he went close, he saw that it was a rusty petrol-drum. The height of the drum suited him perfectly. It was so heavy that he could only roll it slowly. The empty metal drum was resonant and in the silence of the night every rumble had an exaggerated effect in his ears. Inch by inch he moved the drum closer and finally managed to stand it on its end.

Once on the roof, he peered over the wall. Outside was the road past the canal on which stood the entrance some twenty yards away. To let himself down would be too risky. He had to crawl on top of the wall for twenty feet before he could cross to the other side. A guard was pacing at the entrance, rifle on his shoulder. Li Fei waited a quarter of an hour for his chance. At a moment when the guard was out of sight, he swung over to the wall and lay flat on his belly, stopping to look back and see whether he was observed. Having reached the corner, he sat up, took a deep breath, and then worked his way along the wall to the opposite side. The ground was covered with debris, as he had expected.

Letting himself down carefully, he landed in an open yard. The moonlight lit up the broken walls and isolated toppling columns of bricks in fantastic shapes of grey and black. He took his bearings by the faint glow on the mountains, and made his way through the debris of the ghost town, stopping in shadows, afraid of the noise of his own footsteps. Hami was a mass of rubbish, demolished houses, and toppling balconies and destroyed orchards.

Dawn found him sleeping on a forest-clad slope three miles outside Hami, his bundle his pillow.

IN THE MIDDLE OF JUNE TU CHUNG RETURNED TO SI-AN. HIS brother's letter and his daughter's letter made it necessary that he come home sooner than he had planned. But what made him pack up without delay was the fact that when he went down to Sunganor, he saw workmen already trying to restore the dam under the protection of a squad of soldiers from Changshien.

In her state of uncertainty, Jo-an went with Tsujen and Sianghua to meet her father. His return meant even more to her now than when she had begged him to come home for his own sake. It was with less than her usual boyancy that she greeted him at the station. He did not look the worse for the journey.

Chunmei was waiting with her two children to receive them at the raised entrance to the Tafuti. She asked the children to greet their pokung (grand-uncle), and smiled her own welcome. Since her talk with Jo-an, she was even more determined to preserve the good impression she had made on the elder master. She had dressed in a simple mauve gown; her hair was brushed smooth and her eyebrows had been repainted, though she had not put on rouge or lipstick. She looked very much like a young daughter-in-law of the family.

Tu Chung patted the boys' heads and looked at Chunmei appreciatively. He looked up at the signboard with its old, slightly discoloured characters, "Tafuti", and a sigh escaped him. Stooping a little, he went inside.

Aunt Tsaiyun, in a black suit, rose from her chair when they came in, and Tu Fanglin soon came out from his room. The elder brother had not been back for a year. With Tsujen and Sianghua and the young children, the parlour was noisy and crowded, pervaded with the excitement of a family reunion.

Tu Fanglin, comfortable and assured, greeted his brother with the dignity of an ex-mayor, cordial if somewhat aloof. "Elder brother, you have come home."

Like an elder brother Tu Chung grunted for reply. There was a glint when their eyes met, while their mouths smiled. It

was difficult to say which was more self-assured. For a while the superficial activities of arrival, the tea and the hot towels, and the questions of the women and the greeting of the children and inquiries after the journey kept everybody busy. Yet each of the brothers knew in his mind that there was a question to settle, which for the moment they forbore to touch upon.

"You ought to have a little rest before dinner," said Tu Fanglin, looking at his brother with amused tolerance.

"Take your time. Dinner can wait," said Chunmei.

When they were back in their own court, Jo-an said: "Father, I have been so anxious for your return."

"You don't look happy. Is Li Fei still away in Lanchow?"

"No, he has flown to Hami. I don't expect to hear from him for some time."

She did not want to tell her father about herself until she had to. She would know in another two weeks. Tu Chung did not seem tired. Veins stood out on his forehead. He walked into his room and quickly came out again, fire blazing in his eyes. After a moment he said:

"Do you know what your uncle has done? He is putting the dam back again. The Moslems are sulking in silence, watching. He has some soldiers with guns there to supervise the work. That is why I hurried home."

"At dinner tonight," said Jo-an, "you had better not speak about the dam. Let's eat and enjoy ourselves. Chunmei told me that she has prepared an elaborate dinner, but there'll be no fish on the table because she does not want the question to come up and see you brothers start quarrelling in the midst of the dinner. She is quite worried about the whole family situation."

Tu Chung fingered his beard and smiled a slow smile. "That woman has brains."

"And she is now a regular daughter-in-law of the family. When we went to the family cemetery last *chingming*, I saw that her name had been added in red characters to Tsucheng's tombstone, above that of her sons. She had been feeling happier since her position has been regularised."

A good dinner had indeed been prepared. Aunt Tsaiyun was going around the table, checking on the spoons and chopsticks laid out by Chunmei. In honour of the occasion the boys were

dressed in bright red gowns. Tsüjen, in his white duck Chungshan coat and trousers, was at his business-like best. Knowing that his uncle was not fond of him, he went out of his way to be pleasant. He talked of the news of the city and his cement works and projects for the development of the 'Western Capital'. Sianghua was daintily made up and dressed in pale blue Changsha muslin.

Aunt Tsaiyun was examining the bowls. Having nothing else to do, she decided it would be better to put the porcelain spoons on the plates, instead of on the table. Chunmei came out, her face freshly made up, wearing a white printed rayon with polka dots. Her eyes instantly caught the change in the position of the spoons. Not knowing who had made the change, she went around the table putting them back on the table again.

"They should be on the plates," said Tsaiyun. "I want them there."

"I am sorry," answered Chunmei. "I thought it would be better to put them on the table." She went on completing what she was doing. There was a look of quiet desperation on the wife's face.

Tu Chung walked to the head of the table and seated himself there as the senior of the family. Fanglin sat down on one side and Tsaiyun on the other, and the younger people ranged themselves below. As they began eating, each brother was thinking his own thoughts. The elder Tu's higher forehead and longer beard gave him the appearance of greater age, but his eyes were clear and steady and he was thin and wiry, while the ex-mayor, a little shorter than his brother, with bushy eyebrows and full, flabby cheeks, looked every inch the well-established and successful man.

The tenseness of the situation was drowned in the gaiety of the immediate present. Tu Chung seemed not to have a worry on his mind. Glad to be reunited with his family, he was talking most of the time, telling them happily of his life with the lamas. Fanglin was obliging enough to ask a few questions, even though his voice was gruff and sepulchral. His attitude was that of one who knew the tribes of the north-west well enough, including the Tibetan lamas, and who was not interested but just refrained from contradicting.

The younger people did not say a word. Seeing Tu Chung

in a happy and garrulous mood, Jo-an and Chunmei felt greatly relieved. Tu Chung was exuberant that night. With his own kin and the women and children around him, and back in his own mansion, he found it was good to be home. Half-way through the dinner, Fanglin thawed out. Seen face to face, he thought his brother was not the starry-eyed and irresponsible, incomprehensible person his letters had led him to expect. The warm wine relaxed his intestines and put him in a forgiving mood, and the subtle succulency of the sharks' fins made him look happier than he usually was. When the steamed pork, drowned in a gravy of mushrooms, was served, he said, with a touch of brotherliness: "You must eat, brother. You must have starved yourself up in that lamasery."

Chunmei glanced across the table at Jo-an, almost to say that her food had pacified the brothers, and then she added, following the term of address of her children: "Grand-uncle, you are not going back, I hope. You are coming home to stay for good. It will make Jo-an happier, too."

This note of welcome was echoed by Tsujen and Sianghua. Tsaiyun took a large, choice morsel of the pork and put it on his plate.

Tu Chung's eyes were wide. What had happened, he thought? Were they trying to bribe him with food? But he went on eating, knowing that he could choose his own time to bring up his topic. The dinner was rich to superfluity, and he had not tasted such good food for a year. He had drunk six or seven cups of good old *Shaoshing*, and the veins stood out prominently on his temples and a rosy tint spread down to his chin and neck. The dinner concluded with *papaofan*, a pudding of glutinous rice, studded with nuts and lotus seeds and *lungyen* (dragon's eye) and other preserved fruits, which was Sianghua's contribution to her uncle's welcome.

At the end of the dinner, he stood up and said: "We must drink a toast to the memory of our grandfather." Fanglin and the others drank the toast with him. Putting his cup down, he said, with his eyes on the younger people, particularly Chunmei: "You, young people, I want you to remember your grandfather who left us this house and this position and the respect and honour of the Tu name. And do not forget, our heritage is not the property, but this pride of name, of scholarship and

of honour. You must do nothing to dishonour that name. You must . . .”

His voice suddenly broke. He grabbed the arm of his chair for support as he sat down. His body swayed into his chair. A shadow seemed to pass over his face. His eyes closed and his arms were limp. Then he collapsed unconscious, and seemed to roll over to one side.

“Father!” Jo-an screamed.

Chairs were overturned and feet scuttled as everybody rushed to the head of the table. One of Tu Chung’s arms was resting motionless on his lap and the other was hanging over the side of the chair. Fanglin’s jaundiced face turned green with alarm. Tsujen bent over the old man, picked up his left hand to feel his pulse. The motion caused his head to turn slightly and his lips moved, but no sound came. The women were hushed in silence and the children retreated to a corner in fear.

“Take him to my bed,” said Fanglin.

It was impossible to move the limp body. Tangma came forward and helped Tsujen carry the chair across the yard to Fanglin’s room. Jo-an, struck speechless, followed closely. Colour drained from her face. She went in and knelt beside the bed, her eyes looking intently into her father’s face. The light shone on the old man’s white beard, which moved slowly up and down on his chest, the only sign of life. While Tsujen rushed to the telephone to call for a doctor, Chunmei came to the old man’s side and began to rub his palms and feet, his neck and his armpits, to bring back circulation.

Jo-an held her father’s face in her hands and called: “Father! Father!” in frightened tones, and he seemed to hear and not to hear. His lips moved but again no sound came. She took away her hands and his face fell sideways again. Tears brimmed in the daughter’s eyes and she suddenly cried aloud.

“Hush! Steady yourself, Third Aunt,” said Chunmei. “The doctor will come soon.”

Some ten minutes passed. All was still in the room except Jo-an’s stifled sobs. The up-and-down movement of the old man’s beard on his chest eased slowly. Suddenly his body made spasmodic twitches, his head shaking, and a sound half like a rattle and half like an unsuccessful effort to speak was buried in his throat. Then the spasm ceased and the face was perfectly

still. Tsujen bent over, listened at the heart and walked away, his head upon his chest, without a word.

A solemn expression crept into Chunmei's face. Fanglin saw Tsujen shake his head and followed his son out of the room.

Jo-an looked at Chunmei's silent face and turned to look at the others. Her eyes were wide with fright. Piteously she looked around at them and then something seemed to rise up in her throat and choke her and she fell upon her father's body and let out a pitiful, heart-rending wail that tore the hearts of the listeners. She leaned over, her hands stretched out over the body, her face buried in her father's chest, weeping continuously in ebbs and tides of sorrow. When Chunmei lifted her up, her tears had matted her father's beard. With the help of Tangma, Chunmei led her like an automaton to a low chair. The moment was past all words.

With tears in her own eyes, Tangma waddled slowly out of the room and returned with a hot towel. From that moment she never left Jo-an's side.

When the doctor arrived the old man's hands were already cold. The doctor inquired about the circumstances and was told that he had had an attack before. The doctor declared that death was caused by a hæmorrhage in the brain, induced perhaps by the excitement of coming home and by the drinking of too many cups at the feast.

Tangma helped Jo-an to her bed. Paralysed by the sudden tragedy, she lay staring blankly at the ceiling. Something deeper than the loss of her father shook her whole being as she lay with her hands and legs limp and cold, her thoughts whirling in a dark labyrinth of despair. Towards midnight, Tangma made her a cup of tea, and she recovered enough to say: "This is the end."

"Don't be foolish, my child, I will always be with you."

Jo-an did not say anything more. She did not even hear what Tangma was saying. Half an hour later, she began sobbing again, but her tear-wells had run dry. While Tangma sat on the edge of her bed, she saw Jo-an cry herself to sleep out of sheer exhaustion.

* * * *

The day after her father's death Jo-an was completely unnerved. His death meant the burial of all her hopes. If Li Fei had not already taken-off from Lanchow he would probably have dashed back to Si-an in secret. The fortuitous conjunction of events had dashed to pieces all her plans and added to her fears, from which all means of escape were blocked. Now there was but a slim chance of getting a guarantee of Li Fei's safe return. Her dreams of a wedding and of a home with her husband and her father had vanished like vapour. If she had a child coming, she would be in disgrace. The fiction of a marriage in Sunganor, which she had hoped her father would tell the family, had vanished, too. She did not know where Li Fei was and could not even communicate with him. Could she tell his family? His mother and Tuanerh would probably mock at her as a dissolute and immoral girl unworthy to be admitted to the family. A terrific pride surged up in her. She would never let his family know about her condition. There was Fan Wenpo, of course, but she was so wrapped up in her troubles that she hardly thought of him. And what could Fan do? She could not take her woman's troubles to him.

'Jo-an,' she thought, 'you are an unlucky girl. Your mother died and left you a child of fourteen. Now your father has died. You are going to be an unwedded mother and your uncle will probably disown you and society will point its finger at you. Why did all this have to happen? What have you done? You have loved a man, a man any girl would be proud to love and to have. No, you are lucky. He loves only you, of all girls in this world.' Then Li Fei's words came back to her: "Destiny is sometimes a cruel mocker and delights in little tricks to torment lovers." She felt no remorse for what she had done in loving him. Wasn't it wonderful that Li Fei was alive and loved her? Their bodies were apart, but their hearts were united, and he would come back, perhaps only in a few months. He would come back. He would come back. She felt a great strength in his love, and anger at the cruelty of fate. She would, if she must, trudge barefooted in snow or over the hot sands of the desert to see him. She would face anything to wait for him. But she would not face the scorn and laughing eyes at home. She would wait and see what happened. She should know in about two weeks.

As she lay in bed, her mind in utter confusion, she heard distant noise in the other courts. All morning the family was busy preparing for the laying-in of the deceased. Tsujen rushed about to make arrangements for the preparations that go with a big funeral, a matter which would take days. Even Chunmei did not come to see her. Tangma rushed in and out and told her what they were doing. She had brought in the usual bowl of soup noodles for breakfast, but Jo-an looked at it and her stomach turned sick and she said she did not want to eat anything. When the morning was well advanced, Tangma came in with a bowl of almond cream.

"You must eat, my child, or you will be sick. You need all your strength to go through the affair. There will be the laying-in this afternoon and you will have to get up."

It seemed at that hour, when she was abandoned by the entire household, by all the gods and men, that Tangma was the one closest to her, almost like her own mother. The old woman servant sat there and saw that she finished the bowl, however reluctantly.

Towards midday Sianghua came. She had come over late that morning and, being afraid to go near the room where the body lay, she thought of Jo-an and came to comfort her. Though they had never been close, they had had many pleasant hours together, enjoying the motion pictures. Sianghua was closer to her in age and liked the modern things.

"Things are destined by heaven," Sianghua said in her Shanghai accent. "Anyway we have to be thankful that he lived to a grand old age and passed away at home surrounded by his family. Jo-an, I tell you, when I was your age, I thought life was all roses. Now I am married and I know it isn't. Men go out and have their business and they don't care. But women are different. You look at Aunt and Chunmei and me. None of us has things exactly as we wish. I am living far away from my parents and I feel almost alone in this city."

So Sianghua gabbled on, knowing nothing of the young girl's worries. Jo-an had instinctively shrunk away when she came in, as if someone had come to mock at her misfortune, or as if all the world knew already that she was going to have a baby. But as Sianghua began to speak of her own troubles, Jo-an relaxed and listened with interest.

"I want to go to see my parents, but Tsujen does not want me to go."

"He loves you still."

Sianghua bit her lip. "He did when we were first married. I don't know why I am talking like this. I really wish I was a girl like you. Then I was happy and carefree."

Jo-an swallowed hard, conscious of the irony. She eyed Sianghua, so intent on talking about herself. Yet this revelation of another's troubles eased her own pain.

Sianghua went on: "You are young. You have your future before you. Li Fei will return and you will forget all the present troubles. I think he is a good man."

Jo-an's eyes were moist. This was the second time she had heard another woman speak approvingly of Li Fei.

In a little while she heard the slow beating of drums and the sad moan of funeral-horns and a distant hum of human noises outside. Tangma rushed in to say that the Buddhist priests had come, and she must get up.

"The coffin will arrive in about an hour, and you must go out to receive it. We are preparing the body now."

Tangma went to the father's room to take his official mandarin robe and beads and boots and cap from the cabinet, for the deceased was to be buried in his full state dress. Jo-an got up and as she touched her father's dress, she fully awoke to the reality of the situation. Her father's bed, neatly prepared for his return, had not even been slept in, and he was gone!

The afternoon was warm and the trees above the roof were noisy with crows. She washed and looked at herself in the mirror. Tangma brought her the dress of mourning, coarse white cotton with unsewn hem, which the tailor had been asked to rush for the occasion, for she was the most important person in the funeral ceremony as the daughter of the deceased. Over this was thrown a sack of coarse hemp, cut with sleeves, and on her head she was to wear the formal cap with a sharp point on top, made of the same material, and a piece of hemp was sewn over her shoes. Thus dressed, she was led to the front court to await the arrival of the coffin, with Tangma always standing by her side. The central door of the entrance leading to the first court was thrown wide open, and the whole family, dressed in white, were passing back and forth. Chunmei's eyes

were red from weeping. She came and gently put her hand on Jo-an's shoulder and said: "You put your mind at rest. When the coffin arrives, you go out and kneel at the entrance to receive it and then follow it in. We will attend to all the rest."

While Jo-an waited, the ablutions were performed inside amidst the chanting of sutras and the beating of drums and ceremonial bells in a separate court on the east, where the funeral ceremony was to take place. Then the black sandalwood coffin arrived and Jo-an was led down to the yard facing the entrance, where she knelt down as she was told. The priests came and escorted the coffin in with the music of drums and the sad, dreary blating of horns, mixed with the sobbing and weeping of the women.

Jo-an had been afraid, but when she saw her father, as though asleep, fully dressed in his mandarin robe of navy-blue silk and boots, she lost her fear. Tangma never left her side. The body was removed and laid in, and amidst more incantation of Buddhist sutras the cover was put on and nailed. And then Jo-an fell on the coffin and wailed aloud, as she was supposed to do.

During the days that followed, Jo-an was relieved of everything except keeping the vigil at night. Even that was made easy for her by making it short and ceremonial only.

The preparation for the funeral took days. Tu Fanglin wanted to have the funeral fitting to the proper station of the deceased and the family. For a fortnight she waited. She did not even think of her graduation, which was to take place within three days of the funeral. It seemed unimportant now. She watched herself carefully and the absence of any signs confirmed her fears. But even more important to her was news she was expecting from Li Fei. She inquired constantly from Fan, and Fan told her that the moment he had news he would call her up.

One day Li Fei's mother came. She had at first wondered at Jo-an's silence. Then Li Fei's brother had received a copy of the obituary notice which the family had sent out to all their friends. At Jo-an's suggestion to Chunmei, the Li family had been included in the list.

Mrs. Li was a shy woman. Fan did not want to call himself, but urged Mrs. Li to go and comfort the bereaved girl. Mrs.

Li hesitated a great deal. She had never been invited to the Tu mansion, and asked Tuanerh to accompany her.

The women visitors' eyes opened wide when they were led by the doorkeeper through the intricate courts and corridors of the ancient mansion. They lingered over the fine long blue stone pavement and the pear trees and the bead screen and painted girders of the porch, where Jo-an was standing to greet them.

"It is good of you to come, Taitai and Saotse." They all tried to look solemn, yet the glow in their eyes expressed their real pleasure at seeing each other.

Jo-an asked the guests to go in, and Mrs. Li and Tuanerh surveyed the carpet and the furniture with appreciative curiosity.

Mrs. Li expressed her condolence with the usual phrases and then she said: "We were expecting to have a formal exchange of betrothal gifts after your father's return. And now he is gone. I don't know if someone from your family would be good enough to speak for my son to the governor so that he can come back to me."

"That we will see. Everything is more difficult now that my father is gone."

Inevitably they talked of Sinkiang, about which the old woman knew so little. Tuanerh was quiet, but she observed a nervousness in Jo-an's manner. Then Mrs. Li took from her arm an old bracelet of beaten gold, weighing three ounces, and she said: "We are simple people. But I would like you to have this. I know my son will be pleased when you can tell him that I have given you this. As for the more formal things, I am afraid we have to wait until he comes back."

Jo-an knew that the gift was meant as an engagement bracelet, though it was presented as a personal one. She blushed and drops of pearly moisture stood on the lashes of her dark eyes.

She stretched out her white arm and let the mother slip on the bracelet while her heart pounded.

"Keep it a secret if you like, Jo-an, but it makes my old heart happy to see you wear it. I have long reserved it for the one who would be my son's wife."

"And this time I will be your real Saotse," teased Tuanerh.

A heavy load seemed to drop from Jo-an's heart. She would have liked this fine, gentle old woman even if she were not Li

Fei's mother. Tangma came in to pour more tea, and Jo-an proudly showed the bracelet on her arm.

Tangma stared in bewilderment and her mouth opened into a broad smile.

"This is a secret," Jo-an said. "We don't want the family to know yet."

Another woman servant brought in a tray of assorted pastry and nuts and dates and said: "Nainai has sent these for the guests and says she will be over in a few minutes."

"Nainai" (young mistress) had become the term of address for Chunmei among the servants since the promotion of her status. Chunmei had heard from the servant that a Mrs. Li and another young woman were visiting Jo-an. She was occupied with the clerk from the office who was reporting to her on purchases of preserved dates, sugared ginger, and other delicacies for the guests on the day of *kaitiao*, the day set aside for friends to come and pay their respects to the dead. The bill came to over a hundred dollars. Chunmei raised an eyebrow when she heard the sum.

"Tsenmo?" she asked.

"Prices of things have gone up. The dried dragon's eye costs a dollar twenty cents for half a catty." The clerk was borrowed from the shop to help in the busy preparations for the funeral. Chunmei knew that great quantities had been bought because hundreds of guests were expected, but the clerk seemed to have bought more than they could possibly need. In the past fortnight money had rolled out from her hand; the servants had been having a windfall in commissions and she was irritated. She saw the pair of brand-new shoes on the young clerk's feet, and decided to give him a lesson.

"That is enough, Laochang," she said. "We sent for you from the shop because we have not enough domestics in the house to cope with the occasion. In my judgment, five catties of the dragon's eye should be enough. We are not cooking a meal of dragon's eye for the guests. I have not heard of a drought in Fukien and the price should not go up so much, double that of last year. . . ."

"There is the bill," said the clerk. "I thought——"

The young mistress cut him short. "Even if the prices have gone up, there was no need to buy so much. I trusted you to

exercise your judgment. A funeral is a funeral and I am not skimping on what should be spent. After all, the style of the Tafuti should be maintained. I don't grudge you your commissions. But the ancestor's money does not come easily and while I am in charge I don't mean to throw away a thousand dollars on the odds and ends alone. We can't get through with less than four thousand dollars. The coffin cost eight hundred. The other day we bought a hundred catties of sugar. We are not going to poison the guests with sweet stuffs. Even if the stuff unused is always there, we don't have to buy that much. You are new and perhaps unused to this household. Here, take a packet of lotus seeds and a packet of the dragon's eye for your children. But if you cannot get used to this work or if you think that the young mistress is too sharp, I can send for another man in your place."

The young clerk answered: "Yes, yes," his hands respectfully hanging at his sides, his eyes on the floor.

"You can go," said Chunmei.

When he was gone, she went over to Jo-an's court. She had guessed that this must be Li Fci's mother and wanted to see what she was like. She knew that one day the two families would be related.

She came in her white cotton gown with short sleeves coming to the elbow. Mrs. Li had been told about Chunmei. Jo-an had pulled the bracelet off her arm and put it in one of the drawers. Chunmei was introduced as her sister-in-law.

Mrs. Li lifted herself from her seat in politeness.

"I met your son at the governor's ball, and he taught me to dance for the first time. I never thought that he was to leave the city so suddenly."

"I don't understand what he wrote to offend the authorities. We women do not understand such things. But I hope that someone who is a friend of the governor may speak for him and let him come back." The old woman's eyes reddened a little.

Chunmei turned to Jo-an.

"Has there been any news from Mr. Li?"

"None," replied Jo-an quickly. "We don't even know where he is."

"When a man goes away on travel, it is harder for the women

waiting at home than for him. But, Mrs. Li, I don't think you need to worry. I am sure someone will be able to speak for him."

The conversation turned to the funeral and Chunmei excused herself and left.

Mrs. Li's visit lightened, but did not lift, the burden of apprehension from Jo-an's heart. At last she could contain her thoughts no longer. She had to talk to someone, to speak her vagrant thoughts and fears, and perhaps to seek advice. Tangma, too, had noticed her nervousness and her sighs when she sat alone. The first shock of her father's death was over, and the girl should not look so unhappy all the time.

The evening before the funeral, when Tangma brought in the hot water, she waited for Jo-an to finish washing and get in bed and then came and sat by her side and said: "Jo-an, something has been troubling you. You must tell me."

Jo-an wanted to speak, but her tongue clung to the roof of her mouth. Tangma was her confidante. But how was she to begin?

"Tangma, I trust you. Will you keep a secret and not tell a soul?"

"Yes," Tangma whispered.

"My period has been delayed for two months. Last month I did not want to tell you. And now it is long overdue . . ." Suddenly she broke into sobs and covered her face with her hands. "Tangma, what am I going to do?"

Tangma touched her arm and said: "I am glad you have told me. We shall keep quiet about it, and think of a way."

Jo-an's tears flooded her face and her body shook and she turned on her side, facing away.

Tangma tried to turn her over and Jo-an let her hold her hand. She blew her nose and spoke nasally: "It was my fault, not his fault. I loved him so and he was going away and I could not help it. Tangma, you know I would do anything for him. I wanted him to have a few completely happy days with me before he went away."

"I don't blame you. This thing has happened to many girls. Only they are not caught."

"I have told you that we are engaged to marry. He and I bowed before the ancestral tablets with my father. My father

said that he considered us engaged when we performed the bows before the ancestor's spirit tablets."

Tangma's eyes looked steadily at her.

"This thing often happens between two families. The boy and the girl quickly get married and they hush over the matter. It is unfortunate in your case that this happens when Li Fei is away."

"Tangma, is there a way out?"

"If you want to, there is a way. I will help you."

A little sigh escaped Jo-an. She lay staring up at the ceiling.

"You think it over. There is time," said Tangma, and waddled slowly on her bound feet out of the room.

* * * * *

On the day of public condolence by friends of the family and on the day of the funeral procession, Jo-an's face was whiter and sadder, her tears more profuse, her wailing louder and her heart heavier than was usual in a bereaved daughter on such an occasion. She was overcome with a feeling of helplessness against problems too big for her young mind to handle. Many a time while she was standing in position behind a curtain to receive and return the bows of the guests before the portrait of the deceased on that long, wearisome day, from nine o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the afternoon, or on the day of the procession, she felt faint and her knees buckled, and Tangma had to hold her up. When she returned from the funeral procession in a carriage, she was exhausted, her nerves jangled and twisted and her mind floating in a sea of wordless misery. Chunmei and Aunt Tsaiyun all caught the listless, abstracted expression on her face while she bowed in return to the guests like an automaton. As a glow ebbed and flowed across her eyes, following some mysterious patterns of her thoughts, they did not know that she was not sorrowing for her father, but doing something less 'dutiful' and orthodox. She was debating the problem in her mind: shall I ask Tangma for the medicinal stew or not?

Something—Fate, her stars—had contrived to cheat her out of the right to happiness. Why should her father have died when she needed him most? A sense of bafflement, even of resentment, rose in her. If so, she would cheat Fate in return.

Was she to be exposed to the scorn of the public, of that public which was standing here now to pay conventional respect to her father? No, there was no other way out except to ask for Tangma's help. Then she thought of Li Fei and her strength returned. When she thought of him, it seemed that anything she had to go through would be worth the price. The child was Li Fei's seed, a young life within her, and that life was Li Fei's as well as her own, the product of their love. Whatever people might say, it was a beautiful feeling to know that this new life was growing within her, and that it would have the sparkling intelligence and the laughter and the voice of its father. It would have to be a boy. How happy the boy's father would be when he returned to see him. At such thoughts, the glitter would come into her eyes, fleeting like the thought itself, and then vanish like some mysterious ray of light across a dark surface which gleams for a second and then fades away. Then other thoughts, more realistic, more immediate and palpable, of society's condemnation and her own lowered social position—these crowded out the more ethereal, threadlike patterns.

And so she thought—always in a circle. In all that world of friends and relatives, she could not feel certain that any one person would think well of her when her condition was known, not Sianghua, not Chunmei, not Li Fei's mother—none except Tangma. How ashamed she would be before Tuanerh! As for her aunt and her uncle, she dreaded the very thought of them.

22

ALL THE WAY BETWEEN HAMI AND CHIKOCHING THERE WERE only Chinese peasants living in small straggling hamlets. Nobody bothered to look at Li Fei's papers. Very few soldiers were in evidence, for the bulk of the army was thrown west of Chikoching. The Manchurian General Sheng Shih-tsai had driven the Turkis from Chikoching and the whole Barkol area, and was now driving south, clearing the way for the battle of Shanshan, where the Chinese Moslem leader Ma Shih-ming was making his stand. The roads were often full of water from the flooded underground canals, a system of irrigation peculiar

to this place. A few miles below Chikoching the land emerged out of the Tien Shan mountains and sloped sharply into wide grassy valleys and rough loess terraces.

It was two weeks before Li Fei slipped through the battle-line and reached Shanshan, ragged and muddy and fatigued, but happy that he had got through with nothing worse than worn-out soles, blistered feet, and a generally unshaven appearance.

He went straight to the headquarters of Ma Shih-ming, presented the letter of introduction from Ma Chungying's office, and told the story of his escape.

Ma Shih-ming, a Chinese Moslem commander with a pleasant face, read the letters, then looked up at him in amazement.

"Can you send a message to Lanchow?" Li Fei asked.

"I will try. The telegraph to Hami has been cut. We shall have to route it through Turfan, which is still in our hands."

That night he was entertained by the commander and smoked his first cigarette in three days. After dinner he was taken to a primitive clay house with a bare floor and a primitive table and benches and a creaky bed with a shabby soiled quilt. He was not thinking of comforts. He would not exchange the feeling of security for anything, and he had become used to sleeping on the ground in the past fortnight. He threw himself on the bed and crooked his arms behind his head and was happy that he was alive. Lanchow was a thousand miles away and Si-an was a dream city of unbelievable security and comfort, where a girl was waiting in the Tafuti mansion for his news.

Now that he was safe, something akin to sadness overcame him. He had not heard from Jo-an for about three weeks. She might be ill, and she would certainly be lonely and worried about him. Why did he leave her in his madness to rush to Sinkiang? What if he had been killed? The softness of her voice, the fire in her eyes, the frank opening of her heart to him, her passionate quick kisses while running between his room and her father's room up in Dingkor Compa, her clinging warmth and her trickling tears on their last night at Tien Shui, her abrupt turning away on the boat that early morning—all these images and memories seemed to burn into his heart. He felt a sense of guilt in leaving her alone now. This girl who had risked and dared everything to love him was now separated from him by more than geographical distance, by what he now knew to be

the hazards of a strange and ferocious war in a world of deserts and mountains and men without mercy. So far he was lucky to have escaped. Yet he was now in the fighting area itself in a war which was devastating towns and villages and decimating the population, as he had seen on his way—a war of merciless pursuit and annihilation. How long would this war be, and what were his chances of getting away? He had no right to cause so much worry to Jo-an, who loved him so selflessly that she had hardly once protested about his coming.

He felt weak, too—as weak as a child—and warm tears poured down his face as he thought of Jo-an. There are moments in our lives when everything else seems empty and meaningless and only the love of someone close to our heart is the real thing. He seemed to hear a whisper in his ears: “Love, I shall be waiting.” The voice was real to him because he knew that that message across the desert was exactly the thought of Jo-an as she would think it and in the voice of Jo-an as she would say it.

He was now farther away from Si-an and Lanchow than ever. The war was coming westward. Turfan was the strategic centre controlling communications with Urumchi in the north and the road to the Tarim valley in south Turkestan. If the Moslems could hold Turfan, well and good; if not, they might be forced farther westward. He had no idea how and when his message would reach the Lanchow office of Ma Chungying and how efficiently the office would forward it to F’an, since it was purely personal. There was no way of sending letters because the Eurasia planes stopped only at Hami and Urumchi, both in the hands of the Chinese governor whom the Moslems were fighting.

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After a week of perplexity Jo-an still could not make up her mind. Chunmei came and inquired about her, but neither she nor Tangma would divulge the secret. In this dark hour of her despair, when her bowels were tied into a thousand knots of sorrow, she heard the telephone ring. She trembled. It might be the call she had been waiting for.

“Miss Tu,” the voice said, “I have received a telegram from Li Fei, forwarded from Lanchow. He has arrived at Shan-

shan. . . . He is safe and sends his love. . . . Miss Tu, Miss Tu . . .”

The receiver dropped out of her hand and she collapsed in her chair. The words buzzed in her ear and she did not hear the rest. She fell weeping with joy. Tangma ran to take up the receiver.

“What has happened?” the voice continued. “Who are you? Tell Miss Tu that Li Fei has sent a telegram to say that he is safe.”

Quickly Jo-an snatched the telephone again, and asked: “Tell me, I am listening. This is Miss Tu.” Yes, it was Fan’s voice.

“The telegram came from Shanshan. I don’t know where Shanshan is; it must be somewhere in Sinkiang. I shall have to look it up. The telegram is dated ten days ago. That is quick. How are you feeling, Miss Tu? I saw you at the funeral, but of course I could not go up to speak to you. Yes, I have telephoned Li’s mother. Is there anything I can do for you? Why don’t you come to see me?”

Jo-an’s head swirled. “Tangma! He is safe!” Her voice was triumphant.

“Where is he?”

“Some place far off. I shall look it up on the map.”

In her sudden joy she forgot that Li Fei’s telegram had not changed her situation. It only meant that there was contact and that she might get more news from him from now on.

She dressed herself and took a rickshaw to Fan’s house. He had gone out but would soon return. She waited in the parlour and in ten minutes he came and immediately showed her the telegram. The message was forwarded from the office of the Thirty-Sixth Division at Lanchow. No return address was given. What did it mean and where was Shanshan? Fan took out an atlas and found the place. Li Fei evidently had gone far west from Hami and must be with the Mohammedan army. She wanted to send a telegram, but the only way she could send one would be through the Thirty-Sixth Division. It would have to be addressed to the commander in Shanshan. Who was the commander? News about the war was scarce, out of date, and undependable. Fan and Jo-an drafted a telegram. But it was a personal affair, and what guarantee would they have that the

army radio would send it? They would send it, anyway, and trust to luck.

Thus she was cheered for a few days. She settled down to a state of hopeful waiting. In her folly, the folly of happiness, she had exaggerated the value of that telegram, and she thought that there was a chance of his early return.

Three weeks passed. There was dead silence. She followed what little news of the war in Sinkiang there was in the papers. It was often contradictory and unclear, couched in vague terms, probably written up by the news editors. She bought a detailed map of Sinkiang province and studied it and familiarised herself with strange names such as Urumchi, Lop Nor, Barkol, Ussu, Cherchen and Yarkand, mixed with other less foreign-looking names. She got some idea of where the Gobi desert was and how the great Tianshan mountain range divided the province in two. . . .

Then new symptoms began to come. She wanted to vomit in the morning. Fear gripped her, and again old Despair showed on her face. Now she fully realised her position. It did not look as though Li Fei would return soon, and even if he did, it would not help matters. She told Tangma of her decision.

Tangma went out and came back with an assortment of roots, some black and some yellow, and a packet of dried weeds. She warned Jo-an that the effect would be painful and that she would probably be sick for days. But they would be careful and would not let the rest of the family know.

That night she lay in bed convulsed as if something was stabbing her inside. A hot scorching fire burned at her vitals and gripped her in torments of pain. She lay exhausted, thinking she could not live. She cried for water and drank quarts of it, and then the pains grew more bearable. Tangma was frightened, watching her writhing and groaning. The pains ceased as suddenly as they had come.

In the early hours of the morning Jo-an dropped into sleep. The next morning she was so sick that she could not get up. Her face was the colour of the bed sheet. Chunmei heard that she was ill and came to see her. She thought she had colic. There was a smell of the medicine, but Chunmei left without saying anything about it. Later she sent over some sedatives and asked Tangma to give them to her, and said that if she did

not get well, they should send for a doctor. The thought of a doctor's visit frightened Jo-an thoroughly.

Luckily the pains did not return. She lay in bed for three days, taking only light soup and congee, and got up on the third day. In another week the old symptoms returned. She decided that she would not take that medicine again. It might kill her. What was worse, her condition could no longer be concealed. She was so consistently unwell that the women in the house drew their own conclusions.

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Jo-an's mind was made up. At first during dinner-hours, when she was able to join the family at meals, there were silent looks and veiled remarks and indirect hints from Aunt Tsaiyun. These were so general that she did not have to answer them. She merely felt foolish and dumb and doomed. Aunt Tsaiyun, who was never fond of anybody but herself, seemed to delight, during this period, in telling stories of unwedded mothers. If Jo-an was indeed with child, she was in the power of Tsaiyun, who was like a cat playing with a mouse, or like a fisherman playing a fish when he knows the hook has been swallowed. Now and then the fisherman would give a jerk to make sure that the fish was still there, and would slowly and easily let the fish tire itself out. Jo-an could not get away.

"Have you heard from Mr. Li?" Tsaiyun would ask.

"No," Jo-an would answer meekly, but flaming inside, knowing that the answer gave her aunt pleasure and satisfaction.

"Ts! ts! too bad," remarked Tsaiyun, as if she was overflowing with sympathy. "You cannot blame him. Who can tell what may happen in that barbarous country? If you had told me about it, I would have asked you to discourage him from going. But no news is good news. We must wait and see."

She emphasised that last sentence. She meant literally to wait and see. What could Jo-an say? They could see her face flush in morbid anger. The subject seemed to occupy the aunt's mind, which was usually vacant, ready to absorb stories of women who had failed like herself. For years, ever since Chunmei had her first child, she had had this resentment. Chunmei seemed to represent for her all young and pretty women. She saw Chunmei get on so well and was powerless

against her. No, this niece of hers was not going to escape. Scandal was like spice; it made life interesting even though it happened in her own family.

Chunmei saw all this and understood. She was waiting for Jo-an to come to her and take her into her confidence. She was thinking hard. She had gone through the same experience herself. How she had hated it all when she was compelled to marry that coarse gardener. She felt towards Jo-an as one woman towards another who had once been thwarted and humiliated by circumstances and the conventions of society.

As for the uncle, his fears of a scandal in his family were aroused, all his conventional respect for social opinion and his care for the good name of the family were involved. He could not believe that such a thing could happen, probably because this time he was not responsible. His anger at Jo-an's conduct was real. What would people say if Mayor Tu could not control his own niece and there was an illegitimate child in his own family? Moreover, his conscience was free. He had had children by Chunmei; that was easy to understand. Heaven knows he needed her; Chunmei was the only person who made his life worth living, who satisfied his needs of a man for a woman when all was taken into account. He often asked himself what he got out of life. The answer was Chunmei and her little children. What a difference from his yellow-toothed wife! But Jo-an was a woman, and the world would go to pieces if women began to be loose and misbehave and be immoral. The sanctity of the home would be threatened and the basis of public morality undermined.

Furthermore, neither her uncle nor her aunt was unaware of the fact that Jo-an represented her father's branch of the family. Her father's finances were topsy-turvy. The uncle had always been patient and unhappy and irritated about it. Tu Chung was one of those clean and honest officials who actually managed to live on their salaries, stern and uncompromising with himself. What little savings he had had, he had spent in Japan and elsewhere in his travels. Some of his small property in Kiashing was confiscated when the Kuomintang came, and he went down with the crash of General Sun Chuanfang. Fanglin had been helping his brother. Their family fortunes were shared as they often are among brothers in China in that curiously un-

legalistic tradition. When one brother is rich, all his brothers are rich, and, by a kind of divine right of kinship, are entitled to spend his money; when one brother has fallen into debt, it is his brother's duty to honour the debt and pay it even if the debtor brother is dead. In the case of Tu Chung, the family property was inherited in common from the grandfather, and though Tu Chung took money from his brother, it was, at least, income from the ancestral estate, though Fanglin was managing it.

And now, after Tu Chung's sudden death, a problem presented itself. It was unthinkable that he was going to share half of the property with Jo-an, the surviving heiress, while he had his own three sons to think of. Like a good business-man, he resented the idea. He would not want people to say that he had robbed his brother of his property. And yet he felt legitimately that what money there was in the family he and his son had worked for and earned. Was his niece going to sit idle and have an affair with a man and get all the benefit of his own hard work? Thus he reasoned himself into thinking his niece immoral and a disgrace to the family, that if she got into this scrape, it was all her own fault and she must pay for it.

His attitude towards Jo-an, in fact, had changed since her father's death, even before he heard of this suspicion of Jo-an's misconduct. He had been angry with her father and had expected a severe dispute with him over the Sunganor dam. Luckily there was no time for a dispute before his brother's death, but his resentment against what he called Tu Chung's 'irresponsibility' remained and the bitterness was still there.

Worry is the destroyer of health, and Jo-an was suffering even more from nervous upsets than from physical disturbances. She began to be afraid to see people, thinking that penetrating eyes were glancing at her belly, though it was still possible to conceal it. The time would come when she would have to tell them.

23

ONE DAY TSAIYUN CAME OVER TO SEE HER. JO-AN WAS LISTLESS and apathetic, and her lips quivered constantly.

"Poor child, ever since your father's death you have been unwell," Tsaiyun said with apparent compassion. "I am worried day and night for you. I will send for a doctor and see what is the matter."

Tangma was standing by, her eyes glaring in exasperation.

Colour came into Jo-an's face. She would not suffer this slow torture any longer. She would speak straight out and deprive her aunt of the pleasure of tormenting her.

"Aunt," she said, "I have no need of doctors. I am expecting a child."

"You are!" exclaimed the aunt. All her pores opened as if she had held herself in readiness for this moment, like the fisherman's moment of hauling in the fish. Stupidly, she grinned. "That is happiness!" she said, using the regular phrase for pregnancy, but the grin was clearly out of place. In fact, it was ugly to look at because of her yellow teeth.

"And you need not be happy about it," Jo-an went on. "I have disgraced the family, I know. I am going away."

"Going away, where?"

"I don't know. I shall not bother you."

"Is it Mr. Li?"

"Yes," Jo-an firmly answered. She did not want to bother to explain.

Tangma saw the annoyance and defiance in her face. "She told me," she said. "Her father had approved their marriage and they were engaged up at Sunganor. Her father was coming back to make the formal arrangements."

"That is enough, Tangma" said Jo-an. "I have made up my mind. I can get a teaching job in some other town and support myself. Aunt, you tell uncle that I am sorry for causing all this trouble. I have this child in me. That is all there is to it. There is no need for doctors or for further talk."

Tsaiyun was still dissatisfied. She felt rebuffed and confused by the girl's straightforwardness. Why, she thought, the girl had even no sense of shame!

"How old is it?"

"About three months."

"Was it at Sunganor?"

"It need not concern you. Mr. Li has gone away, and I am going to have the child and wait for him."

"I did not say anything," answered the aunt, puzzled.

"Yes, you want to know when and where and how it happened. Will you leave me alone?" Her voice was tense and nervous.

"Look at her!" the aunt cried in anger. "I was anxious for you. What a fine mess you have got yourself into. I thought you would have a sense of shame. I cannot help you, then. You have made your bed and you must lie in it. Other girls who have done what you have done would not boast about it. They would hang themselves."

Jo-an gritted her teeth. "No, Auntie, I am not going to hang myself."

When the aunt was gone, Tangma and Jo-an looked at each other in silence. Both felt the gravity of the turn of events. Jo-an had often said that the time was bound to come when this would be known, and that she was thinking of going away. Now she had announced her decision and it was certain her uncle and aunt were not anxious to deter her from going.

Jo-an had surprised herself. She felt better. She had thought she would indeed die of shame when the question was asked and she had to confess. Now she was glad it was over.

"But where will you go?" Tangma asked.

"I have been thinking of Lanchow. Li Fei's best friend Lang is there. He said if I was ever in trouble, I was to go to him and Fan. That is where the Thirty-Sixth Division is. It is nearer Sinkiang, and it will be easier to get news from him. I will find a job and I will live with O-yun. It is a beautiful city, he wrote me. Meat and vegetables are cheap there and I can support myself. Tangma, I need you. You must come with me."

"Of course. Where else will I go? I never want to leave you, and you will need me especially when the baby comes."

With the decision taken, all her fears and uncertainties seemed gone. Chunmei came then, her face flushed, but her eyes in a glow of excitement. No matter what society said, the news of a woman expecting a child was intrinsically fascinating to another woman.

"I hear you have happiness in your body," said Chunmei. It was the same word Aunt Tsaiyun had used, but there was no mockery in her tone and Jo-an did not resent it. Colour spread over her face.

"Yes," she answered, glancing quickly to the floor.

"Well, Jo-an—let me call you Jo-an—I noticed there was something the matter, but I did not want to ask till the time came." She paused and then asked: "What are you going to do?"

Jo-an told her her decision. Chunmei got up, paced the room, sat down and got up again. Finally, she said: "Perhaps it is best. I know the old man and I will speak to him. It is better to let him know first that you choose to go away than to let him drive you out. Don't give him that chance. He will be angry for a time. I hear you had a quarrel with your aunt. I don't know what she said to you, but you mustn't mind. We young people have to think of our future. Lanchow is nearer the border and you go there and wait for Mr. Li. However it happens, we women have to pay for it. I was an unwed mother, too. It is always like this. But, Jo-an, when you have got a good man, stick to him."

On that day the weather was clammy and oppressive. There was not a breath of air and the sky could not make up its mind whether to rain or not. Jo-an felt short of breath. She had never been so conscious of her body as she was now. Her underdress and brassière were becoming tighter every week. Her breasts were fuller, for nature was preparing her for motherhood. The inexorable development went on, whether or not she ate enough or slept enough. Late in the afternoon she took her bath and, after the bath, she decided she would do away with the brassière. She felt much better, and she did not even button the under-jacket. She stood before her mirror and already felt like a woman. She was glad that Chunmei had been sympathetic.

When she went to dinner, she was overcome by embarrassment. She knew that Aunt Tsaiyun would still be angry with her, but she also felt that the worst was over. She had come out with the naked truth and she had nothing more to hide. Yes, she was in disgrace, but, having made her confession, she felt independent. But what she dreaded was her uncle's wrath.

At dinner Tsaiyun was grimly silent, while Chunmei kept chattering about the children and the weather and other domestic affairs. The uncle was stern and silent, too. Why

wouldn't he say something and get it over? Jo-an ate her rice, and picked at her vegetables gingerly, her mind hardly on her food, waiting for an explosion at any moment. She was conscious her uncle glanced at her several times, but his mind seemed occupied. However angry he was, Tu Fanglin did not want to say anything in front of the servants.

"Come into my room, Jo-an," he said after the dinner was over. She followed him into his room, where he sat in the mahogany chair and went on with the preparations of tobacco for his pipe. She was left standing, since she had not been asked to sit down. Chunmei pottered about the room outside, pretending to be busy.

Jo-an steeled herself for what was coming. Curiously she found her eyes and her mind fastened upon the white scaly specks around her uncle's collar, shiny in the lamplight. Tu Fanglin did not usually look directly at a person when he spoke, but now he shot a glance at his niece and said: "You know what I am going to talk about?"

She was silent. The uncle continued: "I never expected this to happen. Do you realise what you have done?"

"I know," she answered contritely.

"Do you realise that it is wrong, it is a scandal you have brought upon the family?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"I hear you are going away. Under the circumstances, it is the only decent thing for you to do. You were rude to your aunt this afternoon. Apparently you have no sense of shame. I am not driving you from the family. You have driven yourself out and you have nobody to blame but yourself. If your father were living this would not irritate me so much. As it is, I have this responsibility. You place me in a very awkward position. I want you to tell me if you know that you are solely responsible for what is going to happen."

"I know. Nobody is responsible except myself. That is why I am going away."

"I am glad that this point is established. Let no one say that I have driven you out. You have asked to leave yourself. And I am glad. The child you have is not a Tu child. And don't let me see your face again until that young scoundrel marries you. From the very beginning to the end, I had nothing to

do with it. Perhaps he is running away from you. Young men are often like that."

Jo-an felt the cold hostility in his words, and knew he wanted to hurt her and purposely made his words sting. She felt a burning inside. He did not have to refer to her lover in those contemptuous terms.

The words leaped to her lips: "Uncle, you are wrong. He is not running away from me. He is running away from your crooked friends."

The uncle banged the copper tobacco pipe on the table.

"You dare to speak to me like that! Do you know that your father died penniless, that I have been supporting him these last few years? He is dead and we will not talk about him. But I expected you to have some sense of gratitude. So you like to think Li is not running away from you. It is your business, not mine. I don't care what you do, so long as you do not show your face within this house, do you understand?"

"I do very clearly. You want me to say that you have not driven me away, that I have chosen to go away myself, but I must not show my face again in this house. It is grandfather's house, after all."

"We have settled that point already. You said so yourself. I forbid you to come to this house because your presence will disgrace it. Whatever you think does not matter. You have graduated. It is because of me, because you are my niece, that the college has sent me your diploma. You should be able to support yourself and not come begging for money from my hands as your shiftless father did. I shall give you five hundred dollars. You can take that money and get out of my sight. You need not come and say good-bye when you are ready to leave."

This unnecessarily involved discourse had nevertheless one clear central point: namely, that Jo-an was being driven away from the house, but that the uncle was not doing the driving. This did not hurt Jo-an; she understood him and she did not mind.

"Is that all?" she asked, as she was turning to go away.

"One more thing: you may have some crazy idea that grandfather left a lot of money. That is not true. He left some investments in government bonds which became totally worth-

less. Your father knew all about it. He left this house, it is true. When you are properly married, you can come and live in it. I just don't want brats who do not belong to the Tu family to be born here. As for the Sunganor estate, you are aware that grandfather never started the fishery, and that whatever money comes from the fishery I have made myself, and not your father. We will not go into what he did—it would simply wreck the fishery business. I just want you to know the facts."

"The Sunganor property, uncle, is still jointly owned by my father and you."

"That is correct. But your father did nothing to develop it. I made the money. In the last few years I have been supporting your father and you."

"Presumably I own half of the lake property."

"Presumably, yes. You cannot cut the lake in half. That is a thing which must be settled later. We need not go into that now. I hope it is clear to you."

"It is very clear."

Jo-an walked out of the room, exchanged glances with Chunmei, and returned to her own court.

She realised well enough the drift of her uncle's talk, that she was not to expect a share in any property except what he saw fit to give her. She was not in a position to fight him. She was an orphan and alone. She must rely upon herself. She felt a tremendous sense of relief that the interview was over.

She told Tangina: "My uncle is capable of highway robbery if he has to do it."

In order to avoid her uncle, she had dinner served in her own court.

She felt a sense of independence and she did not feel sorry to leave the house. She had never been very happy in it in the last few years, anyway. With the decision to go away came a sense of elation. She never thought of abortion again: she was determined to have her child born in Lanchow while she waited for Li Fei's return.

There was a busy week while she ran about to make preparations for her journey. She decided that she should tell Fan all about her case because she was going to need his help. She had to tell him why she was going away. Sooner or later Lang and

O-yun would know. It was an awkward thing for a girl to say to a man even though he was Li Fei's friend. She began in a roundabout way by telling him that she and Li Fei were engaged, that her father had approved, and went on talking about the days they had spent at Sunganor, but never came to the point. Fan's eyes followed her carefully and sympathetically.

"But why does your uncle send you away?"

Jo-an cast down her eyes bashfully. "We parted at Tien-shui—in the hotel . . ." Suddenly she looked up bravely. "I am going away because Lanchow is nearer Sinkiang and because I want Li Fei's child to be born there."

Fan's countenance changed and his lips tightened into a thin line.

"I understand. If that is the case, I will see you through. I will make all the arrangements, and will go up with you."

"That would be too much trouble for you. I will take Tangma with me."

"It is a five-day bus journey, and you have to stop at hotels. I shall be glad to come along. It is the least I can do. You once helped me and I am glad to be able to do something in return. And I want to see Jushui and O-yun myself. What about Li Fei's mother? Are you going to tell her?"

"No. And you must not tell her, either. Wenpo, you mustn't, for my sake."

Fan looked at her importunate face.

"I understand. Will you never let his family know until Li Fei comes back?"

"They must not know, please. When I am gone and his mother inquires about me, tell her that I have a teaching job at Lanchow. I will write her from there, but I have not the face to see her."

* * * * *

Now that she had decided to go away for a long time, she began to pack and put in all her clothing and as much of her belongings as she could. The days were hot and she wore very little and the rooms were in great disorder. Chunmei and Sianghua came to talk and to help. They felt sorry for her when they saw her going about packing things away and cleaning up her drawers, her hair dishevelled, her feet trailing in

slippers, the lower button of her jacket loose, showing her firm, round hips. Without mentioning the word, they knew and felt that she was an orphan, cast out and almost disinherited. Her eyes were dry and there was calm, even serenity, on her face, though now and then she bit her lips with an injured expression. She did not want to hear a thing about her uncle or her aunt. Tangma helped in packing, but still there were things that Tangma knew nothing about—the books and documents of her father. She went through these and saw the old photographs of the family, of herself as a baby and a child, of her mother and father and grandfather. Only then did her tears fall.

"Leave your father's things here," said Chunmei sadly. "The house is still yours. You can pack them away and have the rooms locked. And, Jo-an, don't be foolish." Somehow it was natural now for Chunmei to call her Jo-an. "The old man will relent. You will come back, I know. After you are gone, this house will be even emptier than before. It simply cannot be. This family is not going to break up like this. And you have your friends. You go away, and later your friends can talk things over with the old man."

"I don't know," replied Jo-an. "I am expecting the worst. My uncle hinted that he would disinherit me. What can I, an inexperienced girl, do against him? I'll be lucky if when the time of settlement comes I am not charged up to the neck with my father's debts to him, and I should feel grateful for being let off without owing him anything. My father is dead, and who can settle the old accounts of the family of the last ten or twenty years? Except for the ancestral property, my father died penniless. That makes me so proud; he never took a cent that was not his own. And this is what he left me—pride; it is all he left me and it is a great deal. I shall depend upon myself."

"Can I look at those photographs?" asked Chunmei, pointing to some snapshots lying on the table.

"Certainly." She showed Chunmei the snapshots which Lang had taken at Lanchow. In one group O-yun, bending over in the garden, was picking vegetables.

"And who is the young girl?"

Jo-an hesitated for a second and then said: "Look carefully. You have seen her before."

"Why, that is the drum singer!"

Jo-an smiled. "Yes. Li Fei told me that Lang is helping her and is asking her to marry him. But she has refused so far."

The day before their departure, Chunmei came and handed her five hundred dollars from her uncle.

"This is what he told me to give you." Then she took out another fifty dollars and said: "This is from me. It is not much, but it will help. You can write to me. I can get people to read your letters for me and write to you."

The trunks were sent ahead. Fan had made all the arrangements. The next day, still wearing the coarse white cotton of mourning, Jo-an went out with a few handbags. At the last moment she hesitated and thought of calling up Li Fei's mother, but decided that she should not. She could face anybody—her uncle, her aunt, Chunmei—and tell them the truth, but she could not hurt that kind and gentle mother. It would hurt her, not only on account of herself, but because of Li Fei, her son.

With Tangma she did not go out through the front gate because she wanted to leave quietly. Only Chunmei and some servants came to the small side gate and stood there watching them get up into the rickshaws. A hot sun was shining overhead. Chunmei loitered until the rickshaws disappeared around the corner of the lane, and then went in with her head bent.

Book V

LANCHOW

24.

LANCHOW PROVED TO BE A BEAUTIFUL PLACE TO STAY IN summer. It was not only the unusual surroundings, mountains on the north and on the south, covered now with dark green, which indeed had an uplifting, ennobling aspect; it was something more immediate, if less palpable. When a city and its environment seem good to live in, there is a combination of circumstances which, defying analysis, is spoken of as the 'air' of the city. Here was the strange colour and atmosphere of an old fortress town, the 'Golden City' as it was called in history, combined with that of a prosperous, northern capital with some twenty thousand inhabitants. It was the busy traffic and the big depots of the fur merchants, the slow, supercilious camel caravans trudging along the northern bank of the Yellow River towards their far-away destinations—into Inner Mongolia on the east, and Sining and Kokonor and the Hami desert on the west. It was the large mixture of local Chinese Mohammedans, distinguished by their white caps or turbans. It was the leisurely if busy-looking traffic in the streets, which were lined with hotels and restaurants. It was the charm of young Kansu girls moving about in jackets and trousers, with dark eyes and gay, frank laughter, especially at the bazaars and markets. It was the exhilarating mountain air, hot in the day-time, but not unbearable, and always cool at night so that one had to sleep with blankets on. It was the fact that the local population was friendly and hospitable, that egg-plants were big, and beef and mutton were excellent, and vegetables cheap. It was the incomparably sweet and juicy tsuikua, or wine melon, at ten cents a catty. It was the fragrant pears that melted like butter and

tasted like ice cream in the mouth. It was the fact that almost every residential house had a large garden and every family grew its own flowers and vegetables.

The excitement of the new home, the change of scenery, the sudden feeling of emancipation from the oppressive Si-an mansion, did much to compensate for Jo-an's recent sorrows and restore her spirits. Everything pointed to a happy stay. She was unknown here and she did not suffer from feeling guilty just because she was bringing a child into this world. Tangma was with her, and she was among friends. The vivacious O-yun, full of gay laughter, was quite different from the impression Jo-an had of her on the stage. Jushui was Li Fei's best friend and therefore her friend, in whom she could confide everything. If he was quieter by disposition than Li Fei, he was highly sensitive and considerate of others, and under the spell of Lanchow and of O-yun he almost bubbled with enthusiasm about the city, as Li Fei had done.

Living in these new surroundings, Jo-an seemed and felt like a new person. The very light of the morning sun coming through the small window of the strange house was different; she had been living at the Tafuti for so long now that, for the first few mornings, each time she opened her eyes she still expected to find the light falling upon the familiar cabinet in her old room, and it was with a sense of delightful novelty that she realised that she was in Lanchow, far away from home, and free. And then she remembered that she was going to support herself. Like a timid fledgling trying its wings, she experienced a new joy of independence. She wanted to use her real name when seeking a job because she wanted to remain herself and not to feel ashamed. Out here she was sure her name Tu Jo-an would not mean anything to anybody.

She had that five hundred and fifty dollars still untouched. She was sure she could teach modern school subjects, especially Chinese literature. She hoped to reserve the money for the coming of the baby. She offered to pay for her rooms, but Lang would not hear of it, and compromised by accepting twenty-four dollars a month for food for her and Tangma. She did not have to buy new clothing. But a housewifely instinct had come out in her once she was on her own. She began to skimp and save against rainy days. She wanted to have the

feeling of money to fall back upon, not only for her confinement, but also for security. Besides, she had a few personal jewels that might be worth two or three hundred dollars.

Fan, after coming with her, had gone back in less than a week. He had approached some local schools on her behalf without any definite success. But primarily he had come to establish contact with Li Fei. Li Fei's letters had said that Al Hakim had been most helpful, and perhaps that was how he had been able to send the radio message through Ma Chung-ying's office in Lanchow. With that telegram, they went to the headquarters and tried to trace the office of origin. Hakim was away in Suchow and nobody in the office seemed to know anything about it. They were directed to a military radio office some ten miles outside the city, where they found a Mohammedan boy of twenty operating a small portable station.

"Where did this message come from?" Fan asked.

The boy studied it and then said: "From Turfan."

"Who sent it from Shanshan?"

"How do I know?"

"Who is the commander at Shanshan?"

"Don't ask me. The Thirty-Sixth Division office perhaps can tell you. So far as I know, there may be no commander there now. Shanshan is in the hands of the enemy."

If the news was exasperating, it was what had to be expected on a shifting war front where the line changed every week. The only thing they could do was to go back to the Division Headquarters and beg for the address of Hakim's office in Suchow. A telegram to Suchow would probably only mystify the receiver, and after careful consultation it was considered best for Jo-an to write a detailed letter to Hakim, asking him how she could best get in touch with Li Fei.

Lang and O-yun were told the cause of Jo-an's leaving Si-an and coming to seek a job in Lanchow. During the evenings, while Fan was still there, the conversation always came back to the subject.

"It is not uncommon for a man to rob his brothers or an uncle to rob his nephews of the family property," said Fan. "Your uncle's words sound exactly as if he has some thing of this sort in mind. He knows you are defenceless since your father is dead, and he can juggle the accounts any way he

pleases. I am going to take a look at Sunganor before I go home."

"Kantieh," said O-yun, "you are a good-hearted person. You should not let such a thing happen to Jo-an." She had implicit trust in the unlimited ability of her 'adopted father' to do anything. She admired even his swarthy pocked-marked face and his fleeting, glinting looks when he was emotionally stirred. She liked him, not only because he had done so much for her, but also because she saw what trouble he had taken in bringing Jo-an to Lanchow, as a friend of Li Fei, in accordance with the chivalrous tradition of the men of the 'rivers and lakes'.

Fan looked at her. He knew that Lang, in spite of his courtship and all he had done for her, was still without encouragement.

"And how about you?" he said. "I don't think you are so good-hearted. What is the matter with Lang? Is he not good enough for you?" His tone was almost paternally severe, so much so that O-yun winced.

Old Tsui's furrowed brow was turned towards Fan. "I've said the same thing but she wouldn't listen to me. Fan laoyeh, you should give her some fatherly advice."

O-yun found herself caught between the glares of three men and the amused gaze of Jo-an. "Kantieh," she said, "I am still young. Jushui has been like an elder brother to me and I am grateful . . ."

Fan cut her short. His voice was familiarly brusque, his eyes on her steadily, if fondly. "Since you are my adopted daughter, I am going to speak to you like a father. If Jushui were blind or crippled or had eleven fingers, I wouldn't ask you to marry him. But he has two eyes and four limbs like everybody else. You are committing a few cardinal sins not to marry him. First, the great unpardonable sin of being an unfilial daughter. You want to make your old father happy in his old age. Second, you are deficient in gratitude. You say you are grateful, but that is an empty word when you won't do a thing to pay him back. And third, you have no mercy in your heart. He loves you, he thinks you are the most wonderful girl he has ever met, and he won't marry anybody else. You don't want to make him miserable. Come, is he too old for you?"

O-yun reeled before this sermon which resembled some old-fashioned passages in the stories she was acquainted with. Lack of filial piety, ingratitude and lack of kindness—all were there—and, of these cardinal sins, lack of filial piety was the greatest. There was an undertone of playfulness in Fan's words, but substantially he meant them. She felt as if she had been slapped on the face. What softened and touched her young heart, however, was the last question. She blushed and hesitated before she answered, "No."

"You like him?"

"Kantieh, if you talk like this, I will not answer your questions. You can't ask a girl what she feels in front of everybody."

"It is not in front of everybody. We are here like a family, isn't that so, Uncle Tsui? All right, then, you tell us."

She recovered herself. "I will accept all your charges—except the sin of undutifulness to my father. This is too heavy a charge for me. I am thinking of my father and what girl of my age is not thinking of marriage? But marriage decides a girl's fate for life. As the proverb says: 'Marry a pig and you follow a pig, marry a dog and you follow a dog.' If I should marry Jushui, wouldn't I be called 'Mrs. Lang'? I was not brought up like educated girls. His friends would laugh at me. And I am not the type to be fed on birds' nests and sharks' fins and be sick all the time and feign illness by holding my hands over my chest. I should be unhappy and would disgrace him. That is the first thing."

"Nobody will force you to eat sharks' fins, if you don't want to," broke in Jushui.

She went on:

"He says he is fascinated by me now, but by and by, after we were married, he would meet a pretty woman of his own class, and then I would kill her. That is the second thing. The third thing is, I am still young. Though I am resting now for a period, after a while I will lead my old life and sing on the stage. Can you imagine a Mrs. Lang singing on the stage? So I say to myself, it won't do. Fourth and last and most important of all, I don't want to cause trouble to anybody. I escaped from Si-an, thanks to your help, but who can guarantee my safety? A man was killed during my escape. If they find me

here, I do not want to drag others into it. So why should I marry now and complicate things?"

Thus she stated her reasons with her natural fluency, and dropped her voice at the end.

Fan uttered a snort of half-approbation and half-surprise.

"Uncle Tsui," he said. "I did not know that your daughter is as eloquent off the stage as on it. On her wedding night, all her bridegroom will do will be to listen to the flow of her words."

"Are my reasons good or not?" O-yun asked.

Jushui answered quickly: "They are not. You are imagining things." He turned to Fan. "There is one thing I want to say to set her mind at ease. She thinks that after marriage she won't be able to go on the stage. Well, that is true of certain families. But I don't think acting or singing in public is a social disgrace. If O-yun wants to, why not? If that is the only thing she is afraid of I will give my word I shall not be in the way. She can go on if she wants to."

"Is that true?" asked O-yun, as her face softened with a look of surprise.

"Yes. I like you just because you are the kind of a girl that you are. I don't want to force anything on you. Go on and be what you are."

Fan ran his fingers over his face and cleared his throat. "O-yun, you have heard what Jushui has just said. I am going to speak as your adopted father. I am going to arrange this match for you and Jushui. None of your reasons is good. Jushui loves you. Everything is perfect, as I see it. He will provide for you, he wants you as you are, and he will not interfere with your going on the stage. What else is there? If you don't listen to me, don't call me your *kantieh* any more. What you need is a good spanking."

And now blood rushed into O-yun's face and she felt a quiver of excitement at the thought of promising to marry Lang. There was a liquid glow in her eyes as she bent her head in a kind of playful, scintillating shyness, expressive of the state of mind of a girl when she was about to consent.

"What do you say, O-yun? Shall I ask your father to spank you thirty strokes on the bottom or not?"

O-yun, raised her furtive eyes, which by some indirect light

took in the figure of Lang sitting tensely on the edge of his chair. Her cheeks were the colour of crimson. Fan saw her wavering and said: "You have got to marry him."

"Is that a father's order?"

"It is an order," said Fan. "And you must accept," he added to make it easy for her.

O-yun laughed and suddenly dashed out of the room.

"Fan *laoyeh*," said her father. "I don't know how to thank you. I have tried hard to persuade her, but got nowhere. With three and a half sentences you have changed her mind."

Fan's face glowed with satisfaction. "She is a very unusual girl, but she needs an adopted father like me to know her own mind."

In the days that followed, O-yun was a different person. There was a softness in her eyes, but she felt shy when she saw Lang, for she had lost her feeling of independence and of completeness in herself. Her voice was lower and her face was meeker and she felt towards him exactly like any other girl towards the man she was going to marry.

Having placed Jo-an in the care of Lang, and being pleased with his success in bringing Lang and O-yun together, Fan returned to Si-an the next day. After he went back to Si-an, he wrote to Jo-an that he had gone to Sunganor and had seen the dam and talked with Hijaz about the Mohammedan valley.

Summer passed quickly into early autumn. With the period of rest and relief from worry Jo-an became her normal self, enjoying the company of Lang and O-yun and the other persons who made up the little household. Her symptoms disappeared and she ate heartily. She was less easily fatigued, though she began to feel the added soft weight of her body.

Mrs. Chao, the landlady, was not deceived. The lie they had told her at first about Jo-an being married had worn thin because O-yun had blurted out something about Jo-an leaving home. Finally the story had to come out that she had only been engaged. Mrs. Chao did not care; to her a woman expecting a child was a woman expecting a child. She had been impressed by this group of peculiar tenants from Si-an—with plenty of money to spend—and particularly by Fan on his short visit. From Tangma the old woman had learned that Jo-an

came from a very rich family living in a large ancestral mansion. The beauty of the young girl, her personal character as Mrs. Cho came to know her, and her sweetly sad abstracted look, made the landlady think that here was a good, inexperienced girl who was paying for the folly of a moment. Therefore Mrs. Chao was willing to help in covering up the situation, and she told the neighbours that Mrs. Li's husband had gone away.

There was a chill in the morning air of autumn and schools were already opening, but Jo-an had not been able to find work. She avoided trying for jobs in government organisations or public institutions where there might be people from Si-an, who might know her family. She therefore looked for a position as tutor in some private family. She was prepared to state her qualifications and to announce that she was Mrs. Li, but preferred to use her maiden name in the profession, as many modern young women were doing. One day she answered an advertisement in the newspaper asking for a girl tutor and, to her happy surprise, was given the job. She was to be paid ten dollars a week for tutoring three young children of a family from Shanghai, whose parents found that they needed to learn the mandarin pronunciation for their class-work. The father, Mr. Chen, was a man of about fifty, working in the textile factory as an engineer. They spoke only the Shanghai dialect at home. Jo-an happened to have lived both in Shanghai and in Peking, where the standard mandarin dialect was spoken, and they were delighted to have her. They knew nothing about Si-an, and Jo-an felt secure. She told them that her husband was away, and that when her time came she would have to take a month off. The family thought that the children would need coaching only for a few months, and in any case they were so satisfied to have her that they considered the subject unimportant.

She had to go to the Chen family only from five to seven or half-past seven, when the children returned for their homework. The work was easy and the pay ample to cover her expenses. Sometimes, when the children were overpressed with homework, she was invited to stay for dinner and finished off the work after dinner. Jo-an knew enough from her own experience, about the heavy school-work placed on young children, but her heart ached to see the eyes of the youngest boy of five droop

towards seven o'clock. The schools of China piled so much work on the children that it constituted almost a national programme for systematically undermining the health of growing children by shutting them up and forbidding them to open their books and study during the best hours of the day, the recitation hours, and then sending them home to do the real study when their minds were tired and their bodies required relaxation outdoors.

Jo-an's time was comparatively free. Like all mothers, she was already knitting sweaters and covers for the baby, and then her face was calm and beautiful. She started also to knit a grey sweater for Li Fei, thinking of the cold of the Sinkiang winter. Sometimes her fingers stood still between stitches and a blank expression came over her face.

There simply had been no news of Li Fei after that first telegram about his arrival at Shanshan. Hakim's letter, though courteous, was not of much help. In the confusing picture of events it would be difficult to trace Li Fei's movements. He would try but he did not hold out much hope. She knew that if Li Fei was able to communicate with her, he would. What had happened? When the sweater was finished and she still did not know where to send it, big tears rolled down her face and she packed it away with a heavy sigh.

Autumn came, dressed in red and green and gold in the forests and on the mountains, and the turbid Yellow River turned a clear blue. On the countryside the leaves were browning and the shorn lambs on the outlying slopes were growing back their wool for the approaching winter. When October came Jo-an grew uneasy. Lang and O-yun and Tangma and even Mrs. Chao were good company, but they were not enough. Lang and O-yun were like a pair of young lovers. There was no discussion of a wedding date or of any formal ceremony of engagement. They just lived on. Once O-yun had accepted Lang as her betrothed, she grew to appreciate his qualities, not easily observable on the surface.

His quiet personality grew on Jo-an after she came to know him. She studied him carefully, especially to see what was in him that made him Li Fei's best friend. She wanted to look at everything from Li Fei's angle.

The first thing about Lang which struck Jo-an was his extra-

ordinary sensitiveness about animals. He had bought a black-bird, a myna, which could be trained to talk. Lang was expert. He handled the bird like a baby when he had to clip its wings and trim the tip of its tongue. He did it gently, with tenderness in his face. Then, thinking of the poor male living alone, he took a great deal of trouble to find a female to keep him company.

Lang was not as entertaining as Li Fei, not as articulate and expressive and incisive in his talk, and he might be accused of indolence. But he was completely genuine and capable of great enthusiasms, even though they were over little things regarded by so-called important people as unimportant. He had a deceptive surface of naivety and candour, almost childishness. O-yun had at first not understood him. Nor did Jo-an until she knew him much better. She, too, would have passed over him as a well-to-do, carefree young man playing with his camera. But clearly Li Fei would not care for such a man if that was all he was. One day she realised with something like a shock that Jushui had seen through life and understood it, that there was profundity in his seeming idleness.

It came to her one Sunday evening, after the three of them came back from a walk together. There was a narrow lane, a short distance from the house, leading to the open country. On both sides were thick hedges, behind which lay fields and farmers' cottages. The lane led directly to a clump of chestnut trees at the end. Lang and O-yun loved to walk in that direction, and this Sunday Jo-an had joined them. After the walk they had their supper, and sat around to talk as they often did. During the evening hours Old Tsui, now feeling a sense of security, used to go out alone to the theatres and tea-houses to enjoy himself, leaving the young people alone. Lang was lounging happily in his chair.

"O-yun, do you know we have passed another day?"

"Of course we have," replied O-yun.

"And we don't know what we have done. You think you have done something today. Today passes and a year from today you won't even remember what you have done today. So will pass tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and the day after the day after tomorrow. Do we know what we are living for?"

"I am sure we don't. But we have to live all the same, don't we?" said Jo-an.

"Exactly. The governor does not know what he is living for. Nor does the banker, nor does the government employee. Nobody knows. Everybody is going somewhere, and nobody knows why he is going."

"You are cynical."

"I am not. I am trying to find out why everybody is so busy, and I have come to the conclusion that everybody lives first of all because he is living, and not because he knows what he is living for."

"I am afraid I don't understand," O-yun said with adoring eyes on him.

"I mean we are all the same, no matter what we do and what we believe. You go out to an isolated village in some deep mountain. You find men and women living there. You would think life in such an isolated place unbearable. It is not unbearable for them. Why? Because they are living. And when you ask the richest man in the country, or the humblest peasant in that village, what makes him interested in life, what keeps him going, the answer is always the same: The mother lives for her children, the husband lives for his wife, the old man lives to see his daughters and his sons get married. Am I right? Rich and poor, we all live for the same things. So what holds the world together? It is this love for someone else outside ourselves, whether it be wife or children or parents. Even the worst criminal in this world cares for somebody. If he didn't, he would soon take his own life."

* * * * *

October was the best month in Lanchow. Hakim's letter told Jo-an that he would be coming to the city in two or three weeks and that he had already sent a radio message to Ma Shih-ming to locate Li Fei and give him news of Jo-an's arrival in Lanchow. Jo-an was hopeful. Meanwhile, the consciousness of the growing baby in her body gave her a sense of pride and consecration, and a feeling of wonder that this stirring life within her was part of Li Fei. The very thought made her happy, but it made her also more contemplative. With the period of rest and the congenial company of Lang and O-yun

and the attentive care of Tangma, nature wrought a miracle in her. There was a healthy glow on her skin, her eyes were deeper, and she had an enormous appetite. Through Lang's repeated persuasion, she went to consult a Western-trained doctor, who told her that everything was in order. He did not ask many details and put her name down as Mrs. Li. She had borrowed a wedding ring for the occasion.

25

ABOUT THE MIDDLE OF OCTOBER, WHEN THEY WERE SITTING down to dinner, several policemen from the provincial government appeared at the house. They dropped their chopsticks and listened while Mrs. Chao went out to see the policemen.

They heard a man's voice ask: "Have you a girl here by the name of Tsui O-yun?"

"What do you want?"

"We have an order to arrest her."

They stared at one another in silence. O-yun's eyes were distended with fear. A flutter of apprehensions ran through the company. The father was getting up to drag O-yun through the kitchen door when the policemen stepped into the room.

"Which one is Tsui O-yun?" the officer demanded.

O-yun was in a frenzy, hiding her face behind Lang's back.

"What do you want her for?" asked Lang.

"We have a request from Si-an to take her as a material witness in a murder case. I am sorry. Come along."

-When Lang protested, the officer said: "What is your relation?"

O-yun stepped forward quickly and answered. "No relation. We are fellow tenants. I am living here with my father."

The officer made inquiries about the others, wrote down her father's name and Lang's name and then ordered O-yun to follow him.

"If I must go, you must allow me to take along some clothing."

"Officer, you must have a cup of tea," said Mrs. Chao. "Sit down while she gets ready."

"Tell her not to try to get away. The back door is guarded."

Old Tsui was on the point of tears. "Officer, will anything happen to her?"

"That depends on Si-an. We have nothing to do with it, except to send her over for trial. It's a pity. She is such a pretty girl, too."

"Please, have mercy. You don't know what they may do to her in Si-an."

"I am sorry. Duty is duty. What can I do?"

He looked around the room and waddled to the dining-table and flipped his cap on it. His eyes rested on Jo-an.

"What are you doing here?"

"I am tutoring mandarin in a private family."

The officer seemed to be in a talkative mood.

"How much do you get a week?"

"Ten dollars."

Lang took the opportunity to slip into O-yun's room. She was sobbing in soft little sniffs while she was putting a few things together. When she heard Lang tiptoe in, she turned and faced him.

"You mustn't worry," she said in a low whisper. "They are arresting me and are not arresting you. You send a telegram to Fan and tell him not to worry. They cannot get anything out of me. I'll probably have to sit in jail, but they are not going to drag anything out of me. How do I know who killed the Manchurian guard? I may be able to get away. Perhaps my *kantieh* can also get me out. If not, one thing is sure, you people will not be involved."

Lang took out of his wallet two hundred dollars and said: "Take this, and be liberal with tips. I shall come to see you."

"You had better not. It would serve no purpose. You look after Father. Tell him to get away, and you get away too. If I can get away, I will—and get in touch with you through *kantieh*." Lang was surprised by her presence of mind.

When he returned to the dining-room, the officer was still engaging Jo-an in conversation. He looked up and then studied his fingernails. "Isn't she that famous drum singer I read about somewhere in the papers?"

The father was still pleading. "You don't know the governor of that province. My daughter was kidnapped by him."

The officer gaped in surprise.

At this moment, O-yun appeared at the door with a bag in her hand. Her face was grim and her misty eyes shot a look at her father, afraid that he would talk too much. "I am coming," she said, to interrupt the conversation. When the father saw that his daughter was being really taken away, he broke into a frenzy of appeals. She put a hand on her father's shoulder and said: "Father, don't worry about me. They are taking me only as a witness." Then suddenly she could not control herself and fell upon his breast. The officer stood by patiently and then touched her on the shoulder.

"Come!" he ordered.

The lantern in one of the policemen's hands was turned on brightly and the others were standing ready. At the threshold O-yun turned and stood still, casting a look of farewell at Lang and the others. Tears were in her eyes. Weakly she said: "Good-bye to you all. Take good care of yourselves. Don't worry about me."

Abruptly she turned, bent her head, and walked away with the police. Outside, the unpaved road was dark. The lantern illuminated the policemen's strides, casting long, moving shadows on the wall. Old Tsui stared until the men's crunching steps died away in the distance, and then his whole frame seemed to sag.

In the lamplight, their faces were blanched and their eyes filled with anxiety. Lang paced the floor agitatedly, running his fingers through his hair. Tangma, who had hidden herself in the kitchen, now stood by the wall, her hands tucked inside the tails of her jacket.

"Who could have told them?" the father asked, still standing by the door. "What can we do now?"

Lang seemed not to hear. His hands crossed behind his back, he drew up before a window, peering into the dark, lost in thought. Jo-an saw him lift a finger to his eye.

"Who could have told the police that O-yun is living here?" asked Jo-an.

Lang's voice was choked when he turned and said: "It is a mystery. The first thing is to send a telegram and tell Wenpo.

There may be complication when she is questioned. No, we had better send the telegram tomorrow when we can think better about what should be done."

Jo-an hardly slept that night. She lay in bed thinking, seized with a sense of unknown fears. The arrest of O-yun touched her closely. If O-yun was questioned, she and all her friends would be involved. The tracing of O-yun to Lanchow was unexpected. How would the police of Si-an know of her presence here? She had a sense of impending disaster, of luck running against her, and her uneasiness was increased by the dark, which heightened her imagination. She felt that something, somebody, was tracking her down, that fate was remorseless, that she had brought O-yun bad luck. She felt the weight of her baby, and turned on her side and looked out through the shutters at the rising moon. She heard Jushui pacing about in his room.

She got up, pushed the shutters open, looked out at the clear cold moon over the Kaolan mountains, and felt she was living remote and friendless in this strange north-western frontier city.

She heard Tangma's bed creak on the opposite side of the room. Tangma lit the small pewter oil lamp, ticking the wick up with her hairpin. Throwing on her quilted jacket, she got her feet into her slippers and shuffled over to sit on Jo-an's bed.

"I've been thinking," Tangma whispered. "It may be your uncle. He probably knows you are staying with O-yun."

"My uncle must have heard about it. He may have asked Chunmei, and Chunmei knows. I gave her my address."

Jo-an did not like to think of this, to believe it.

Tangma clicked her tongue and sighed. "If your uncle knows, he would probably notify the police, to cause you trouble. He has no good-will towards you and he is probably hoping you or Li Fei will be involved."

"He wants to hurt my friends because he wants to hurt me. But I can't believe that Chunmei would help him."

The more they talked, the more they were inclined to believe in their explanation. Jo-an remembered that Chunmei had seen the photographs of O-yun taken here at Lanchow.

"You shouldn't have shown them to her."

"How did I know my uncle would try to get after us after I left the house? And Chunmei is not that kind."

It was useless to guess in the dark, but the uncertainty was left in her mind. She hated her uncle, almost as if she knew for certain that it was he who had informed the police. She thought of her father at that moment and felt again her utter loneliness.

"My baby is stirring," she told Tangma as she felt a soft pressure.

"You go to sleep. Heaven has eyes to see. I have seen much of life and I don't believe that the wicked go unpunished in this world."

A myriad of thoughts crowded into her mind—mostly conjectures and apprehensions about O-yun's fate and what was going to happen to Lang and Fan—about the absence of news of Li Fei, and about herself. With those confused thoughts she fell asleep.

In the morning she found O-yun's father had gone out early. Lang said: "Old Tsui is probably trying to get some information from his friends."

"What do you think?" Jo-an asked, looking at Jushui's haggard face.

"We must send the telegram to Fan. Only I don't know exactly what to say. Wenpo has influence in Si-an, and perhaps he can do something after she gets there. They know very well she couldn't have killed the guard with a stone-cutter's drill. She has no enemy who is thirsting for her blood."

Jo-an told him her thoughts. "I am afraid my coming has caused O-yun and you this trouble."

Jushui would not believe it.

"Why should your uncle want to destroy you?" Propping his finger against his cheek, Jushui tried to grasp the implications. Her explanation seemed to be the only one that made sense, and it threw some light on what was likely to happen. There might be some chance for O-yun if he knew that the motive of the informer was only to cause trouble for Jo-an and disperse her friends.

"There is a plane leaving for Si-an tomorrow. I will send a long letter to Fan to tell him what we think. He may be able to think of ways. He is Li Fei's friend and he will probably go after your uncle if he goes too far. I think you had better change your address. It would do no harm for you to move to another place. Nobody has to know except us."

"I think he is right," said Tangma.

"I am thinking of going away, too," said Lang. "Last night O-yun told me to take her father away and look after him. I think that is what I have to do until we know what is coming next."

When Old Tsui returned, he told them he had been out to see Old Wang and had asked him to get information from the provincial jail. They could always communicate with O-yun through Old Wang, who had friends who had access to the jailers. All jail officers wanted only money. Old Wang would be a useful source of information.

Lang told him that they should move away.

"I cannot go away until I know where my daughter is being sent." Old Tsui's narrow shoulders bent more than ever and his breath came in a series of long and short puffs.

Lang said: "Perhaps it is all right to wait a few days. When O-yun is put under examination, it may involve Fan and all of us who are staying with her. We are all in it together. After we have the information on how O-yun is going to be taken to Si-an, we had better go away somewhere for a while."

They passed the hours in restless uncertainty until, late in the afternoon, Old Wang came with some good news. O-yun was in the provincial jail and the jailer had been given twenty dollars so that she should be comfortable and well treated. There seemed to be no immediate danger of their being involved unless further word was received from the Si-an government. But Lang felt as if they were sitting on a cushion of needles.

That night Old Tsui and Lang went to the prison, taking food and an extra blanket and pillow. The jail officer, a middle-aged man in civilian dress, was informal and polite and showed them to O-yun's cell. Their footsteps echoed along the dark corridor.

"Yes," said the officer. "I heard about the case. We have nothing to do with it here, except to send her to Si-an. We shall have to wait for some soldiers to take her."

O-yun was wearing the grey gown in which she had been taken the night before. A small electric ceiling light threw a weak red glare on the walls of the cell and cast shadows over her small profile beneath a mass of shaggy, uncombed tresses. Lang took both of her hands. When his eyes were adjusted to

the light, Lang saw that she had been weeping. Yet her voice was taut, and there was a wan smile on her face.

Lang moved a wooden chair for Old Tsui to sit down. O-yun went to him and, putting her hands on his shoulders, she said: "Your unlucky daughter has run into this trouble. But they can't do anything to me. Jushui will take care of you while I am away, and you shouldn't worry."

The father looked up and rolled his eyes in a state of helpless misery.

Lang said: "We are letting Fan know and he may be able to do something."

O-yun smiled. "They won't dare put me on open trial. If the people knew how I was detained, it would not be too pretty on the governor himself."

"Probably they won't give you an open trial."

After they left they felt much better. O-yun had shown great self-possession.

For a few days they were able to see her every other day. She was still the same. The officer told them that she ate and slept well. Lang took her some books to read because she said she did not know how to pass the time in jail.

"Are you feeling all right?" he asked.

"I am all right. Only this prison rice is hard to swallow. It's a mush, half mixed with dirt and sand. If one is not careful, it will break one's teeth."

"Do you have women servants?"

"I don't need women servants. There was a young jailer who tried to be fresh with me, but he did not have a chance."

On their third visit, they found that a woman had been put into the same cell, and she and O-yun seemed to get on well. O-yun was always happier when she had somebody to talk to.

While Lang and Old Tsui were relieved to see her quiet acceptance of her temporary detention, they were busy preparing to move. Fan had telegraphed them asking them to go away for safety and to let him know when O-yun was taken to Si-an. The telegram asked them to communicate through his servant Laolu.

Lang told Jo-an, "I am thinking of going to Hochow with Old Tsui. I shall feel better if you will come away with us."

"I don't want to go away. Hakim's letter said he would be

coming, and I must see him. Then, in my condition, I don't think I can stand a cart journey. I would rather stay in Lanchow and change my address. If any news from Li Fei comes to the office, I must be here."

Lang was compelled to follow her wish. He succeeded in finding two rooms for her in the Shikuan section just outside the West Gate. They were not at all suitable. The floor was unpaved, the furniture bare and the walls had not been white-washed for years. The landlady, Mrs. Tsien, was a widow with bleary eyes. But Jo-an liked the place because the widow was alone and it was in an isolated area. The rent was cheap, only twelve dollars a month. The location also pleased her because her room had a window which looked out across the river to the highway on the opposite bank. She was told that this was the road that led to Kokonor and Sinkiang. There was constant traffic of men and pack animals and carts moving on the highway, and she imagined that that was the road by which Li Fei would return.

The very next day Jo-an and Tangma moved out of Mrs. Chao's house, telling her that they were leaving the city and moving south. Jo-an had considerable luggage because she had brought all her personal possessions, books and clothing, filling two trunks. She went about her work grimly and determinedly, but Tangma told her to take frequent rests and not to strain herself, and did all the heavy work of lifting and moving. Lang and Old Tsui helped with the transportation.

After they had moved into their new quarters, Jo-an said: "Tangma, you have come a long way with me. It is hard on you. Lang and O-yun are going away and I shall be all alone. I haven't much money to pay you now, but I shall never forget you."

"Don't talk about pay. I have served your father these fifteen years and I will never leave you. You will soon have your baby. Are you scared?"

"No, I am not."

Two days later Lang and Old Tsui came to say good-bye. Jo-an asked: "What has happened?" Lang looked around the house. "It is all right. The landlady is hard of hearing," Jo-an said.

"We are leaving tomorrow. We went to the prison this after-

noon and were told that O-yun had been taken away by two soldiers. I didn't have a chance to say good-bye. I asked how they were going and the officer said: 'On foot of course!'" Lang exclaimed angrily.

"On foot!" cried Jo-an.

Old Tsui said: "It is the old system. The soldier gets his ration allowance according to mileage, and the longer the road, the better for him. I think they are taking her by way of Pingliang. It is the old route."

The route via Pingliang was the longest way to the border of the province, where O-yun would be handed over to the custody of the Shensi police.

O-yun should be able to make the journey in three or four weeks before the severe winter sets in. Luckily she was provided with money which would make her trip easier. But at best it was risky to trust a young girl with soldiers for escort, and their minds were not at ease. If they had gone by bus to Tienshui and taken the train at Paochi, much unnecessary hardship could be spared. It was exasperating, but a government usually chose the most expensive way of doing a thing. It was just the old routine and nobody was surprised.

"Jo-an," said Lang, "I feel awfully uneasy about leaving you here. Won't you change your mind?"

"No. I must stay here." She thought for a moment and then said: "How am I going to get in touch with you? You must write and tell me your address. I am 'Mrs. Li' here and I am going to change my name to Nai-an."

'Nai-an' means endurance in peace. Lang was impressed by Jo-an's stubborn determination to stay at Lanchow and wait for Li Fei. "The name is appropriate," he said. "You seem resolved to go through everything once your mind is made up."

Jo-an said: "I have a suggestion for you, if you want to feel secure. Why don't you go to Sunganor and go up to the lamasery and stay there until you know how the case is turning out? The place is as remote from the outside world as anywhere you can imagine. And you can always get back to Si-an in two days when it is necessary."

Lang and Old Tsui had really had no definite idea where they were going, and gratefully accepted Jo-an's suggestion. They could go to Sunganor by way of Tienshui without difficulty.

When they stood up to leave, Lang took out fifty dollars and said: "Jo-an, I am not looking after you as I should. Please take this money. I have not much with me because I had to give O-yun some, but I can always send some more. If you don't like this place, you may be able to find a better one later."

She looked at him with appreciation. "Li Fei will thank you when he knows."

Lang's quiet voice quivered as he said: "Look after yourself well." Her eyes were moist as she watched them go.

That night, as she stood looking out of her window and saw the clear autumn moon rise over the iron bridge in the shadow of the North Pagoda Hill, she was seized with utter loneliness. Tangma was the only person left with her. The Yellow River, a clear deep green at this season by daylight, now was a dark, swift current, its surface rippling in the moonlight. The river was split by two islets, and as the streams converged near her house they made a swish in the silence of the night. She thought of her father and of Li Fei and let her mind wander to her childhood, her mother, and her days in Peking. When she thought of her Si-an home, it seemed remote, though she had left it only two months ago. She almost regretted her cosy little court and thought that those were, after all, wonderful days when she had peace of mind and no worries or responsibilities. At this distance, musing in the dark before the window, she had no anger, but only saw her uncle as a selfish and dark, sinister figure, an unhappy man after all. Then she thought of Chunmei. She refused to believe that Chunmei had anything to do with this trouble. Then the life inside her stirred and she waked to the present moment and knew that it was for this life that she had fled here. Inner happiness filled her and strength returned to her.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Tangma, seeing her standing silently against the window.

Jo-an turned back. "Just thinking that now we two are truly alone. The baby was just kicking. He must be a strong, lusty baby."

"You must lie down now. I will make you a pot of good tea."

Jo-an obeyed and went to her hard wooden bed, which Tangma had made soft by giving up her own bed quilt to be used as a mattress for the time being. The house had no electric

light. A big, old kerosene lamp stood on the table, throwing a mocking light on the disfigured walls.

When Tangma had brought her the tea, she grasped Tangma's old hand tightly. With the other hand Tangma softly tucked the bedding around her shoulders.

"My child," she said. "Heaven is not blind. I will go tomorrow to the temple and pray for you and for Li Fei's return."

She withdrew her hand and turned the lamplight low. The moon had risen high and cast a white light on the floor beneath the window. She saw Jo-an's eyes drooping and she blew out the light. Then she stepped lightly into her own bed and lay listening to Jo-an's quiet, steady breathing.

26

THE HOUSE ON THE BANK, BY ITS GENERAL ASPECT OF DISREPAIR and its location, could only be described as a poor man's lodging. A narrow unpainted gate, barely three feet wide, opened from a low wall of mud bricks, covered on top with reeds. While the house itself was of red brick and plastered, there were large patches of discoloured yellow lime, resembling islands on a map, to emphasise the fact that the owner was too poor to care for appearances. The small space between the wall and the house had been turned into a garden for cabbages and leeks. Grapevines covered the western wall, while on the other side a sheltered space was used for storing firewood. Yet, if the owner had spent a hundred and fifty dollars to renovate it, it could have become a neat house for a small, happy family. It stood on a slight elevation and commanded a fair view of the Kaolan mountains and overlooked the roofs of the houses inside the city. On the north side it stood some thirty feet above the river, from which it was separated by a muddy bank in part filled with gravel and rocks and in part overgrown with reeds. Because of the greatly varying levels and frequent flooded condition of the Yellow River, the low lands had been abandoned. The current was deeper on the north side, where the water swirled past the rocky shore, leaving a bank of yellow mud on the near side. No boats navigated the river, but the floats made of the raw hides

of entire cows and pigs and horses were often seen carrying cargo from Sining.

Mrs. Tsien, the landlady, constantly wore a greasy black jacket coming to her knees. She was a sour, sad-faced woman, as untidy in her person as in her house. She seemed to take the attitude: I rent my house as it is, and if you expect finery you should not have come to this place. She let her tenants use the big stove in the kitchen, while she used a portable clay stove to cook her own meals.

Jo-an would never think of entertaining guests here, and yet she felt a certain satisfaction in setting up a home alone with Tangma, because she had never done so before. It took days of scrubbing and cleaning to make the kitchen and the two rooms they occupied present a livable and moderately comfortable appearance. Tangma was doing all the work herself without help from the landlady.

Jo-an did not want to touch her savings of five or six hundred dollars. Nevertheless, she was willing to spend thirty or forty dollars to buy new bedding and blankets and cushions; she was already looking for a baby crib and planning to put it against the south window. She thought that the unpaved floor of the bedroom should be covered, and spent another twelve dollars to buy mats. The landlady would not spend a cent to buy an extra piece of furniture or a new pot.

Jo-an entered into these activities in the spirit of making a new home for herself and her baby. She bought a length of blue cloth to cover the trunks, on which she placed some of her books and odds and ends. Then she bought a leather frame for Li Fei's photograph and put it on the table which she used for dressing. From her collection of her father's calligraphy, she selected a copy of Tao Yuanming's poem in fine script written especially for her. She had this and a water-sketch of a Shensi horse by Lang mounted and hung on the wall. The room now had a warm if not exactly cosy atmosphere. When the white baby crib was installed below the south window, she began to feel that she had a home.

She had so transformed the room that when the landlady was invited to see it, a rare smile was forced to her face. The landlady saw the fine clothing she wore and knew that she came from a well-to-do family, and wondered why she had chosen to

live in this place. Her attitude changed from aloof indifference to respectful interest and even pity.

Jo-an still kept her tutoring job with the Chen family. It was about two-thirds of a mile off. Walking began to be heavy for her and at first she rode in a rickshaw. The doctor, however, advised her to do a little walking every day, and so she did, starting early to allow plenty of time.

She avoided all social contacts, but when Mr. Chen invited her to a Sunday dinner with his family in a restaurant, she accepted. She was happy to be treated so much like a member of the family. The Chens were surprised, too, for she dressed too well for a girl earning a living by tutoring. She wore a black satin gown buttoned at the neck, and her red cardigan overcoat with squirrel collar made a distinct impression of elegance. Mrs. Chen was curious and asked her about her family. She replied that her father had once worked under Sun Chuanfang, but had died recently. Mrs. Chen thought it a pity for a young girl with her baby so well advanced to walk so far to earn ten dollars a week, and she often asked her to stay for dinner. The days were getting very short, and Jo-an always hired a rickshaw to get home.

Except for the late afternoon hours her time was free. When the sun came out, she often took a stool and sat in the garden, looking at the growing vegetables and across the wall at the city below, and thinking of far-away things. Then her face became pensive, or she would lift up her eyes and see the white fleecy clouds sailing the grey sky westward. Sometimes she stood for a quarter of an hour before the western window until her legs grew stiff. She began to keep a diary, putting down her thoughts and longings, and the diary unconsciously became addressed to Li Fei as if she were writing letters to him, talking to him out of the depths of her heart. She seldom missed a day, but she tired easily, and some of the entries consisted of only a few lines.

Some days were a murky grey with lowering clouds over the mountain-tops. The room was then dark, for the windows were small, bathed in that kind of semi-twilight when it was neither quite right to turn on the lamp nor to do without it. The latter part of November was windy with frequent drizzles which never quite became a downpour and never quite gave promise of clear-

ing, as if all that moisture above, ready to fall but blown about at the mercy of the winds, had nowhere else to go. For days the distant mountains were covered in banks of mist and fog. The mud floor of the sitting-room became wet and slimy and it was almost impossible to keep the bedroom floor clean of footprints, and washing took days to dry. Then Jo-an found it necessary to buy a small charcoal-burning stove and put it in the bedroom to serve the double purpose of drying and warming the room.

Walking to the Chen home with raindrops pelting her face, she had a sense of the independence of earning her own living. Many a girl, she thought, had left her home for the same reason and was comparatively worse off. Her aunt had said to her: "You have made your own bed, now you must lie in it." She was doing so, and with no regrets. She almost felt that by letting the rain hit her face while trudging alone in the strange city she gave expression to the love she had for Li Fei. So she arrived at that state which may be described as miserably happy or happily miserable.

Sometimes, usually on Wednesday evenings, she heard an aeroplane roar overhead, arriving from Hami, and then her heart stirred, hoping for letters the next morning. But she had not even seen a postman enter the door since she moved in, though she had given her forwarding address to the post office. Li Fei had been away now for three months since the telegram about his arrival. She was so used to the silence that, though she sat and waited and hoped on Thursday mornings, she was not surprised any longer. But Thursday always put her into a despondent mood.

She subscribed to a local newspaper, besides the Sinkungpao, and avidly read any news about the war in Sinkiang. The notice of the Eurasia flying schedule caught her attention. There was a scheduled flight between Lanchow and Hami-Urumchi every week. There must be passengers arriving every Wednesday from Sinkiang. If she went to the airport, she might be able to find someone, question someone, or overhear conversations about what was happening. Thereafter, every Wednesday evening she took a rickshaw and went directly from the Chen home to the airport to watch the plane come in. There was a reception-room at the airport where waiting passengers could have coffee and sandwiches. Often there were Europeans travelling between

Berlin and Shanghai. When the plane arrived, pilots in white uniforms, Chinese and Germans, usually came in. Sitting alone at her table, she caught bits of conversation that were always interesting to her. It was a kind of contact with that remote world where Li Fei was lost like a grain of sand on the desert, but it was good to see people who had come from that desert. Her appearance became familiar to the clerks and waiters, but since she spoke to nobody, they let her alone.

* * * *

At last one day an orderly arrived from the headquarters of the Thirty-Sixth Division and said that Lieutenant-Colonel Hakim wanted to see her the next day at lunch. Her heart jumped. She could not sleep all night. She wished she could go to see Hakim at once. If he had sent for her in the middle of the night, she would have gone. She imagined all sorts of news that he was going to tell her. He was her only connection with the Sinkiang world.

When the morning dawned she was all impatience. She thought again of rushing to Hakim's office before lunch, but decided she had better not. Surely he would not refuse to see her, because his father and her father had been great friends. But he had been good enough to reserve lunch-time for her, and they would be better able to talk at leisure. Of course he would notice her condition, but she did not wish to hide it from him. She had to tell him why she had left Si-an and had come up here to live alone, and it was through him that she wanted to let Li Fei know the news. Hakim must know everything. Li Fei had written to her that he had been most helpful and friendly.

The appointment was for half-past twelve, and she was at his office at twelve. Her handbag and her red coat gave her the appearance of a smartly dressed modern Chinese girl. Soldiers in grey uniform and large astrakhan hats with fur-lined ear-flaps passed out and in through the large room. She took a mirror from her handbag and touched up her lips while she waited.

Shortly before half-past twelve, the office door opened and out stepped a tall, lean officer with a well-trimmed moustache and beard. His deep brown eyes glittered when he saw the smartly dressed young woman in red. She wondered if her

condition showed beneath her ample coat. Hakim extended both his hands.

"Why, is this you, Miss Tu? It is unbelievable!" His voice was quick but low. His brown hair was brushed straight back and he was holding his army hat and his gaberdine army coat in one hand, together with a well-worn brief-case.

"Come, we'll go for lunch near-by," he said as he put on his hat and walked out with her, to the wide-eyed amusement of the clerks in the office.

It was a bright, sunny day, but Jo-an hardly noticed it.

"It's wonderful to be back at Lanchow," said Hakim as he glanced about the crowded street, holding his head high. "Suchow is a small town, bitterly cold at this time of the year."

"Have you news of Li Fei?" Jo-an asked, drawing a quick breath.

"Not directly."

"But you know where he is?"

Hakim looked sideways at his companion. "Not yet. We can be sure of one thing. When General Ma Shih-ming finds out where he is, he will let me know. I will tell you at lunch. You don't mind a Mohammedan restaurant?"

"Not at all."

They went into a shop with an open front marked by a carved wooden tablet, with the words 'Pure and True' on it, serving notice to Mohammedan clients that it was of their religion. Half a slaughtered lamb hung on an iron hook over the shop front. The waiter knew Hakim and led him to a small inside room. The sunlight came in through a latticed window, throwing a pattern of white specks on the floor and the benches. Mohammedan restaurants were known for their general cleanliness, and the benches and the uncovered table were clean and well scrubbed.

Hakim helped Jo-an to take her coat off, his eyes resting for a moment on her noticeably enlarged figure. Then he threw his coat and hat into a chair and offered her a seat in the sunlight.

"Li Fei did not tell me you were married."

"We are not," she replied, holding her bent knuckles below her chin and looking at him straight without seeming embarrassed. The dancing rays of light were reflected on her face. Hakim's eyes rolled slightly to take in the meaning.

He ordered rice and boiled beef in large morsels and a dish of cold chicken. "There is no beef like that they serve here," he said, and ordered six ounces of warm wine.

Hakim poured the wine and they drank a toast to Li Fei.

"His long silence is hard to understand," she said.

Hakim drew his lips into a thin line. "Sinkiang is not like the inland. It is a continent. There is mail, of course, but only by aeroplane from Hami, and Hami is now in enemy hands. Only if Li Fei were on the enemy side, in Urumchi or Hami, would he be able to send you news directly. It is a common thing for letters to take three months. They come now by way of Charkhlik. Only our army has a courier system and it takes six weeks. Nothing is dependable."

Hakim paused to phrase the words he wanted to say as hopefully as he could. "I gave him letters of introduction to Ma Shih-ming and Ma Fu-ming and Yollbars Khan. Yollbars Khan is the leader of the Turkis, with Hodja Niaz." He was purposely slow and roundabout. "They were ministers to the deposed king of Hami. You have heard that the whole palace was burned down and sacked. I am glad the Chinese Mohammedans are helping us. You know how I feel, of course. I am a good old Uighur, my ancestors came from Khotan . . . But, to come to Li Fei. I do not understand how he could have got through the fighting-line to our side, so that he was able to telegraph from Shanshan. Now Shanshan is lost to that Manchurian commander. Apparently when Ma Shih-ming retreated Li Fei stayed behind."

Jo-an's mouth formed a circle. "What does that mean?"

"Perhaps he escaped elsewhere, or perhaps, as a Chinese newspaper correspondent, he merely stayed on. So far we know only that he seems to have lost touch with General Ma."

"They wouldn't kill him, would they?" Jo-an's heart was pounding.

Hakim laughed. "Why should they? He is not a Mohammedan. With us, the Manchurian shows no mercy. It is like that in wartime anywhere. Do you know anybody who could communicate with the other side?"

"I don't know anybody."

"Why not try Li Fei's newspaper? They should be able to demand news from the governor of Sinkiang."

Hakim offered to send a telegram to the Sinkungpao at Shanghai. "My office is in a curious position. We are part of the Chinese National Army, but we are fighting the Chinese governor of Sinkiang. That monster is practically independent and he does what he likes."

Jo-an's hopes rose again with Hakim's suggestion of getting some word through the newspaper. In her helpless situation she was very happy that he took such an active interest in her troubles.

"Miss Tu," he said, "your father was our friend, but you have that bastard of an uncle. He drove my father and me out of the fishing business." He jerked his head back and chuckled. "But I am doing pretty well now. If your uncle had not forbidden us to fish in your lake, I should still be a fisherman. Li Fei told me your father broke the dam. Were you there?"

"I was. And I saw how happy your people were when the river in the valley filled up again."

"Ah, yes, but now I hear the dam has gone up again. Young Tu, your cousin, came with soldiers to see it done."

"Why don't your people tear it down?"

Hakim's head jerked again. "You wait and see. Some day there will be trouble. We don't get justice from your magistrates. Your uncle and young Tu have influence. But when this war is over, law or no law, I don't think our returning soldiers will put up with it. There is bitterness in their hearts. They have seen our peasants out there driven from their lands, and their homes burned down, whole villages destroyed, cattle slaughtered. Miss Tu, I am talking to you frankly. My father often spoke to me about your grandfather when he was governor. But those days are over and gone. Blood will have to be spilled."

"Hakim," said Jo-an, "you are helping me and I will tell you everything." She told him why Li Fei had to flee Si-an, how they had met at Sunganor and how her uncle had driven her away from her home.

Hakim listened sympathetically and said: "Don't you think there is something deeper than appears on the surface? Sunganor belonged to your father and your uncle, and you are the heirress. So we have at least one common enemy at home. When I return I have a debt to collect and it will not be

through the Chinese magistrate's law court. I will shake your hand on that."

He extended his hand and Jo-an gave him hers.

"Your affair is upon my shoulders. Now that I know what your uncle has done to you, I feel like helping you even more, as if you were my own sister."

When they left the restaurant, Hakim took her back to his office and introduced her to a major named Abdull' Beg. Major Beg was a man in his forties, with a likeable fleshy face and a flat nose, hardly distinguishable from a Chinese except for his tuft of greyish-brown beard. Hakim himself would come to Lanchow about once a month, but Beg was permanently in charge of the office.

"Mrs. Li is a friend of my family," said Hakim. "I want you to do everything for her when I am away."

The telegram was sent to Sinkungpao, and Jo-an went home with no appreciable information about Li Fei, but with the satisfying knowledge that something was being done to trace him on both the Chinese and the Mohammedan side. At least there had been no bad news. But clearly Li Fei was in difficulty, or he would have been able to send some word. Tangma saw her lying on her bed, staring at the wall. Then she collected herself and got up to continue knitting a woollen coverlet for her baby. Stitch by stitch she worked, her face grim and silent. The suspicion that Li Fei was in trouble was firmly lodged in her mind. She had been told that there was already snow in Sinkiang, that the winter was bitterly cold in the Turfan area. She forgot her own troubles, forgot the cold in her own room and thought that she was, by comparison, living in luxury. Then it began to seem to her that with Hakim's help Li Fei would surely return. She even pictured their celebration of his return.

"Tangma," she said suddenly, "we will eat out at a restaurant tonight. You get ready, and when I come back from the Chen family we will go out."

The sky was already dark when they went into a restaurant, the best in the city, the Chinchenglou (Golden City).

Jo-an's face was even gay when she asked the waiter: "Have you got a dish called nine-twisted intestines?"

"Never heard of it."

"I mean boiled pork intestines. You cut them up and tie

each length into a knot, then boil them soft and juicy. It makes a delicious creamy soup."

"Why didn't you say so?"

Then she ordered chicken rolls and fried gizzards (which Li Fei loved), and steamed turtle—all a replica of the menu she had had with him on their last night at Tienshui.

They had eight ounces of warm Shaohing. When the big bowl of boiled intestines was served, Jo-an's eyes gleamed. As she put the hot, velvety morsels into her mouth and tasted the subtle flavour, she tried to recapture the memory of the night of their parting. Her eyes were brighter and her manner gayer than Tangma had seen in months.

"My child, I am glad to see you happy once more."

"I am happy. And when he returns, we will come here and celebrate it together, just we three and the baby. And my uncle will come and apologise to me. He will see how happy we are. I am going to live to let him see that I have married a clever man and am happy, do you hear?" Her eyes were misty as she said: "He will come back." Then she crumpled into tears. Tangma bent over her.

"Shed your tears, my child. It is good for you. And then he will come and you will shed a different kind of tears, tears of happiness."

It was good that they were in a small room by themselves. Tangma ordered a hot towel and she wiped Jo-an's face with it. "I have been silly," Jo-an said.

She went home feeling somehow better in spirit. Tangma tucked her in bed, and Jo-an went to sleep almost instantly.

* * * * *

A few days later the postman for the first time walked into her house with a letter addressed to 'Mrs. Li Nai-an.' She tore it open. It was from Lang. Her eyes grew bigger and bigger as she read.

"What has happened?"

"Tsujen has been killed!"

The letter was sent by Lang from Sunganor.

Dear Jo-an:

Old Tsui and I have been here for ten days in a state of constant worry about O-yun. No news has been heard so far,

but she was not expected to arrive at Si-an yet. Fan has come here to consult with me. She may arrive at Si-an in about a week, and I am going back with Fan. We have places to stay, but not at Fan's house, so do not send letters yet. O-yun's father is still up at the lamasery. I came down to Sunganor to meet Fan. Together we went to the Mohammedan village and the dam and had a wonderful day with Hijaz. I saw Hakim's wife too. They were very cordial. Most of the young men have gone to the army. Wenpo and I spent a day riding down the valley, because Wenpo took a great interest in what you told him.

Now I must tell you the important news. Your cousin Tsujen was here to inspect the dam. He fell off the dam and was hit by a falling boulder and killed. Hijaz told us about it. He died by accident. Nobody killed him. *All the witnesses agreed.* His head was smashed and his body was found in a pool below the dam.

Know that our thoughts are always with you and with Li Fei. Wenpo and I talk about you constantly, and we admire your quiet heroism. This news about your cousin will shock you, but keep it to yourself. 'The Dingkor Gumpa is beautiful as you said, and I would enjoy a stay there, but my present state of mind hardly allows me to enjoy the beauties of nature when I see tragedies enacted by the wicked human heart. Wenpo will write to you when he is free.

Take good care of yourself, Jo-an. Winter is coming. Eat regularly and await the coming of the baby, but do not distress your mind. With warmest regards,
Jushui.

She let the letter lie open in her hand. It was a warm, sincere letter, like the writer himself, though it contained such shocking news. Her first thought was that what her father had predicted had come true. She thought of Sianghua and wondered how she and her uncle and aunt and Chunmei would take the news. She felt sorry that Tsujen should die so young, though she had never had much in common with him.

When she re-read the letter her eyes caught the underlined sentences. From the unnatural defensive emphasis she suspected that Tsujen had not died by accident. '*Nobody killed him.*'

She suspected Fan's mysterious hand. Her father had said if the dam was not broken, Sunganor would not be safe to live in. How wise her father was!

She learned the true story from Fan's mouth when he came up to see her later.

He had examined the valley and, standing idly beneath the dam, he asked Hijaz: "Are the soldiers always here?"

"No, when the dam was completed, an order by the magistrate of Changhsien was posted, warning people not to tamper with it under penalty of prosecution strictly according to law. Then the soldiers left."

"I have seen the poster," said Fan.

"Well, that woman Mizra, whose husband had committed suicide on account of the ban on fishing, ignored the order. One day, she took a hoe and went up to the dam and chopped off some of the bamboo strips. She did this all by herself. She made a small breach, and a few boulders began to fall over with the current. But it was not much of a breach. The matter was reported. A few days later we heard a gunshot at sunset. Then we knew Tsujen had arrived. It was his regular way of announcing his presence at the lake. He is staying at the Sunganor house now."

"Is he accompanied by soldiers or alone?"

"He came yesterday to inspect the dam. We didn't see any soldiers."

"He should quickly have the breach repaired. You see those loose boulders up there. It is dangerous, you know," said Fan, eyeing Hijaz. "With that breach there a man could easily trip and fall off if he came close to it. If there are soldiers around, it is different. But if he should by any chance step on a loose boulder and fall over, there wouldn't even be any witness to tell how he fell. In fact, it's no joke. It is not deep below, but if a man fell down the boulders would certainly roll over and bury him. I can see how such a thing could happen."

Fan continued his story. "I said just that and nothing more. The next day Lang and I left for Dingkor Gompa. When we came down again Hijaz told us how it happened. Tsujen came to the village and demanded to see the Mohammedan priest and asked who had made the breach in the dam. 'What breach?' asked Azal. 'Come and see it. I want to report to the authorities.'

Azal went with him gladly. The villagers scowled when they saw Tsujen going off with the priest. Some men and women followed them to the dam, Mizra among them. Tsujen insisted that some of the bamboo strips had been cut. So they went up to see, the two of them. Would you believe it? While they were standing close to the breach, a big black mastiff sprang out of nowhere and began to bark and pounce at Tsujen as if the animal was a good Mohammedan. Tsujen took fright. He retreated and just tripped and fell over. Most unfortunately, a big boulder fell after him and crashed right on his skull. Tsujen's body lay at the bottom of the dam and nobody dared to touch it. The next day a constable came and made inquiries. All the witnesses swore that they saw it happen, and that Tsujen had been careless."

Fan paused for a moment and then added: "They didn't tell about the dog. The dog, Hijaz told me privately, belongs to Mizra."

Fan's eyes blinked, giving the impression that he, too, had not told the whole story. It was Fan's way to sound mysterious and to leave something for his listeners to guess about.

27

LI FEI HAD FOLLOWED THE MOSLEM ARMY WHEN IT RETREATED from Shanshan. Having thrown in his lot with the Moslems and been well received by Ma Shih-ming, he decided to go to Turfan, from which point he might work his way by the southern route, avoiding the Hami desert. The Manchurian general, Sheng Shih-tsai, one of the strongest leaders under Governor Chin, moved his forces from place to place, seeking out the Moslem units. The population of the whole countryside were Turkis, mainly Uighurs and some roving Kirghiz, with a good mixture of Tungans, or Chinese Moslems. Sheng was carrying out a war, not of armies, but of racial extermination. Ma, therefore, had the whole countryside with him. The battles were ferocious and merciless. Sheng's soldiers slaughtered whole Turki settlements, and reduced towns and villages to ashes on his bloody warpath. The cruelty and ferocity of the conflicts,

instead of subjugating the Turki people, only dispersed them, and Ma Shih-ming's forces daily grew in strength. It might be said that Ma Shih-ming's forces also slaughtered the Chinese and those of their own population who were not willing to join the rebels. Everywhere Li Fei saw Turki men with badges of white cloth pinned on their chests, men who had joined as recruits, but in the state of confusion were not yet organised or assigned into units.

Sheng Shih-tsai's forces had struck north of Shanshan and Ma Shih-ming instead of offering resistance, had decided to retreat westward and lure him to Turfan, where the topography favoured defensive war. With the scarcity of transportation, all pack animals had been commandeered by the army, and all except a very few officers marched on foot, passing, for days, maize and barley fields, still untouched by the pillaging hordes. Tall poplar groves alternated with bare denuded hills where nothing grew, whose sides stood on ledges and vertical funnelled columns like ruined sculptured temples. Pretty young women, dressed in gay colours, carried their babies in their arms and followed the general exodus.

Turfan was a big ancient city, dominated by a gigantic mosque with a minaret a hundred feet high, finely laid with tiles making intricate patterns in relief, curiously shaped like a monster rocket, round and with a moulded nose at the top. Centuries of invasions by tribes in Central Asia had left their influence on the architecture of the city. The alleys were unpaved, but the square white houses with flat roofs rose twenty to thirty feet, looking like fortresses to Li Fei's Chinese eyes. Here and there were bazaars covered with reed mats stretching across the alleyways. Controlling Sinkiang's ancient highways to the great inhabited valleys north and south of the Tianshan range, it was a rich and prosperous city, famous for its grapes and wines. The countryside was watered by underground canals guiding water from the hills. The Tungan general made his base of operations here. He could go up north and strike at Urumchi, the capital itself, or go south and west, following the ancient silk road to the Tarim valley; and if he was strong enough, he could hit back at Hami and join forces with Ma Chungying.

Life in Turfan was not without its compensation. Li Fei had

come to learn about the life of Sinkiang and he was doing so. He had picked up a few words of the Turki dialect and he saw enough of the Turkis and the Tungans to be able to tell them apart in most cases. The Tungans spoke Chinese and dressed in Chinese garments, but unlike the eastern Chinese they had thick eyebrows and square foreheads, rounder eyes and more pointed noses, and, above all, they wore thick, bristly beards.

Like the others, Li Fei had cut a piece of white cloth and pinned it on his chest, which made his intercourse with the local people easier. He did not try to understand the war any more. What he had seen from Chikoching to Shanshan filled him with a sense of horror, of the sheer bestiality of it. Whatever the origin of the war or the justification for it, it had ceased to have any meaning for him now. War meant now only a spreading curse, wandering hordes of refugees, burning homesteads and charred carcasses, the dislocation of everything in civilised life, bringing men and women down to the savage level of struggling for the mere right to breathe and keep alive and find a floor to sleep on. Here in Turfan there was peace, but a peace so insecure and so close to destruction that it saddened him. He understood only one thing, the anger and bitterness in the hearts of men who had been driven from their ancient homes and whose relatives had been slaughtered. Nothing was going to stop it except a war to the death, until one side or the other won and imposed a peace of nervous insecurity. Even the word Moslem lost all meaning for him. The Moslems were just men and women and boys and girls who wanted to live like himself. He felt and thought almost like one of them.

He was in this state of mind when the battle of Dawancheng took place. Dawancheng was only fifty miles from Turfan. It was hardly a town, but only a small native settlement, controlling the pass to Urumchi another fifty or sixty miles away. It was in enemy hands, but so fantastic was the disorder in the high command at Urumchi that only one or two hundred soldiers guarded the strategic point. Had it not been for the Manchurian general and the Russian *émigré* regiment, Urumchi would have fallen long ago. Chin's soldiers were ill-clad and ill-disciplined. Encouraged by his growing strength, Ma Shih-ming decided to launch an attack upon Dawancheng and dash upon Urumchi itself. An advance column of five hundred men

filed along the mountain path and made a ridiculously easy capture of the military station. Caught in the night drinking and making merry, the Chinese soldiers were slaughtered, only a small portion having escaped. There was no fighting to speak of. The Moslem victors encamped at Dawancheng, threatening Urumchi itself.

All the next day Ma's reinforcements were coming up. The road was blocked with carts and horses and stocks of supplies in preparation for the assault upon the capital. In the evening, however, bullets began to whistle. It was shortly after supper and the soldiers were in camp, making ready to sleep after the busy day's work. Li Fei was walking behind a cottage near the headquarters when the rifle-fire began. Bullets hit the near-by rocks with a sharp, metallic ping. Then he heard bugle calls. Men in all stages of undress were rushing about. A crescent moon was smiling wanly in the sky just above the crest. In the dim dusk he saw dark, moving masses spreading up the hill-sides. The cottage lights went out and all around him the land was alive with the sounds of soldiers' footsteps taking positions higher up. From the distance came the clatter of horses' hoofs which, at first muffled, became like a gathering thunder as the enemy cavalry emerged around a gap in the hills.

Li Fei ran up-hill as the cavalry came charging down the valley. His instinct told him to get away from the centre of the valley as volleys of rifle-fire began to rake the houses where he had crouched. As he ran, he saw a house start to burn. Yellow glares began to illumine the hill-sides. All around was the crackle of cross-fire concentrated on the cavalry below. By the intermittent flashes he saw the white gleam of clashing steel, rearing horses and tumbling bodies. Caught in the cross-fire, the cavalry began to disperse in all directions, one party going right through the burning store of supplies, heading up the ridge where they had come, to cut off the Moslem retreat. The moon had gone behind a thin mantle of clouds and in the dusk only flashes of gunfire revealed the indescribable confusion. Near him the groans of the dying and the curses of the living came through the clatter of guns. The firing became desultory and more organised, as the enemy, having sought shelter, indulged less in wild, erratic shooting.

Li Fei found himself on a ledge, his body prone but

completely exposed. As he crawled into a more sheltered position, his hand touched something warm and moist. A moan issued from the moving body. A sudden flash of light showed the face of a young boy, hardly sixteen or seventeen, and the white of his terror-stricken eyes. "Where are you hurt?" The boy answered with a whimper. Li Fei tried to move him, and he screamed. His knee had been smashed into a mass of bleeding flesh. Bullets from below sang and whistled in the air, scattering rocks and dust crumbling down from above. Li Fei lifted the light body of the boy on his back and got on his feet to dash to a dark spot above. He had not gone five paces when a bullet nicked his ankle. A sudden reflex caused him to stumble and, as his knee bent, the fleshy burden fell with him and hit the ground with a thud. He tried to get on his feet, but his right leg refused to move. The smell of powder and dust was filling the place. With his face down, he lay still and felt the cold air close to the ground. His hand fumbled at the boy's body. The moans had ceased. Slowly he dragged himself up towards the dark projecting ledge where he would be out of danger from rolling rocks, and out of the line of direct fire. Above him he saw the dark shapes of branches tracing wriggling patterns against the faint, greyish sky. His head was perfectly clear. Some glares from the burning houses and supply carts were dying out, leaving a pall of grey smoke which appeared like a white mist in the night. The last thing he saw and remembered was the appearance of moving cavalry over the crest opposite. Then a crash blinded him.

When he came to, the first thing he was conscious of was a smell of wet grass, and the drip of clear, cool water on his face. He opened his eyes. His first thought was a faint memory of the battle and a realisation that he was alive. He tried to feel his head and face and then found that the broken trunk of a tree was lying across his legs. He tried to sit up and found that his legs were numb. With an effort, he pushed the trunk away. Water was dripping over his head from the soaked trees above and the ground below was soggy. The sky was semi-dark, heavily laden with woolly clouds so close that he could not judge whether it was night or day. A deathly silence reigned over the valley. As his eyes tried to focus upon the distance, the wavy, eerie forms settled into a definite shape and pattern. The smell

of rain mixed with the odours of powder and smouldering wood. He decided that it was dawn.

As his eyes gradually adjusted to the light, he saw below a drooping flag which was not the white Moslem flag but the Chinese National flag of red and blue with a white star. He had thought that he had gone a great distance up the hill during the night, but now he saw the smouldering ruins of the houses in the valley only two hundred feet below him. Now and then he heard isolated shots in the distance. The incoming troops were gathering their wounded or pumping lead into the surviving enemy soldiers. The short coat of black lamb which he had bought at Turfan was soaked on the outside, and his shirt was wet in spots. A flying splinter had grazed his wrist, but he had escaped without serious injury. Probably a flying rock had blown down the tree trunk which hit him on the head and then fell across his legs. He stretched and felt a returning sensation. His hands were caked with the yellow slime of the ground, but curiously the rain had washed his face clean during his spell of unconsciousness.

He pushed the entangling branches further away and struggled to his feet. The pain in his ankle shot through his body but he managed to reach the ledge where he stood leaning, surveying the carnage. Below him lay men's bodies in fantastic postures. Apparently the Moslem army had fled. As he was wondering what he was to do, he heard a shout in a raspy voice from behind.

"Who are you?"

A rifle was pointed at him twenty paces away. He knew that Moslems were shot at sight. Quickly he raised his hands and said: "Don't shoot. I am a Chinese, a reporter from Shanghai."

The man in uniform advanced. Behind him were three or four soldiers. Li Fei quickly jerked the white cloth out of his shirt and dropped it without being noticed. The soldier looked him over and saw that he was in civilian dress. He felt over his body and then asked him to identify himself. Li Fei took out of his black wallet his name card, with his newspaper's name printed on it.

"You are lucky," said the sergeant. "I was going to shoot when I saw you had no beard. You have to come along."

Now the other soldiers had come up, and with their help Li Fei got down to the valley, hopping on one leg.

An officer sitting on a rock near a small fire studied the press card and demanded: "Why are you with the Moslem rebels?"

"I am a newspaper-man, reporting on the war. That is my duty. I am strictly neutral."

The officer gave a scowl and shook his head.

An hour later, when it was daylight, the wounded were gradually assembled. He was served a cup of tea with the rest. It was not till noon that stretcher squads were formed to carry the wounded, and mules and donkeys were brought for those who could ride.

* * * * *

When the party reached Urumchi, Li Fei was taken to the governor's brother, who seemed to be in command. Li Fei's was a special case. Chin, like his brother, had a long face with thick eyebrows and narrow eyes. People called it the horse face because it was long between the brow and the mouth. Li Fei was summarily ordered to be detained. No discussion was allowed. The fact that he was a newspaper-man seemed to decide everything. Governor Chin had put a censorship on all news and did not allow newspaper-men to leave the area. Besides, he had been caught with the Moslem rebels.

"Do you know you are lucky to have escaped being shot on the field? You ought to congratulate yourself for being alive."

He was led to the provincial prison. The only section of Urumchi he had seen was the few blocks between the army headquarters and the large prison compound.

The prison was crowded with all classes of people who for one reason or another had offended or displeased the authorities. When, two days later, he was found to be the same person who had escaped from the detention-house in Hami with letters showing his connection with Ma Chungying's office, he was removed to another prison near Sitachiao (Big Western Bridge) where the Moslem prisoners were kept. His plea to send word to his newspaper was coldly rejected. Now he realised the despotic and autocratic character of the governor's rule, of which he had heard many gruesome stories.

He thought the only thing to do was to resign himself to his

fate and sit in prison until the war was over. He, was worried on account of Jo-an and of his mother, but once the situation was accepted, he decided he must keep himself in good condition. There was nothing else he could do. He was permitted some books and pen and paper, which seemed a great luxury. The jailer saw that he was a scholar and gave him as much paper as he wanted. The light was bad, but his happiest hours were when he could put his thoughts on paper.

When a telegram arrived from his newspaper addressed to the governor's office inquiring about him, Li Fei was not even aware of it. Governor Chin blandly ignored the telegram.

* * * * *

After the interview with Ilakim and his promise to make inquiries on both sides, Jo-an's hopes were raised. As often as she dared she went to Major Beg's office to inquire if any word had come from the Shanghai newspaper. Nothing had been heard. Her thoughts turned more and more to the possibility of getting news from some of the passengers on the Hami-Urumchi plane. She went again and again to the airport on Wednesday evenings.

The plane usually stopped for one or two hours before continuing its journey to Shanghai. Usually a few passengers came through the reception-room, mostly military officers and government officials. These people were too important and too much in a hurry to answer questions. Once she got up enough courage to stop a civilian passenger, an old man.

"How is the weather at Urumchi?"

"It is freezing cold. Conditions are horrible. Food is expensive. Supplies do not come in and prices soar. The army commandeers everything."

"Is it easy or possible to get in?"

The old man smiled a bitter smile. "Everybody is trying to get out."

The next Wednesday the rickshaw ride to the airfield took more than half an hour. The road was completely dark and it was bitterly cold. She wrapped herself up warmly and managed to get there in time to have a cup of coffee and a sandwich. Then she went out to the fenced-in porch and watched the plane circle the field, descend, and taxi round until it came to

rest. The routine of the airfield fascinated her. Pilots in white caps and uniform usually came down along with the passengers and came in for hot coffee. These pilots must know a great deal about Hami and Urumchi.

Jo-an came in and sat at a table and ordered another sandwich and coffee. Two young pilots were sitting at the next table. Several times before, they had noticed the young woman in a red coat sitting alone, her face always wrapped in thought and her eyes dreamy.

"Waiting for somebody?" one of them asked.

"Yes. I came to meet a friend. He hasn't turned up."

Jo-an pretended to look out of the window at the illuminated runway, while now and then she glanced back towards the pilots. One of the pilots stood up, put on his cap and came over to her.

"Can I give you a lift to town?"

"Aren't you going on to Shanghai?"

"No. What do you think we are made of? It's another good night's flight to Shanghai."

"Then you are stopping here?"

"Yes, until the out-going trip on Friday. I can take you back to town in our car. It is such a cold night."

The young pilot was pleasant and agreeable. He introduced himself as Pao Tienchi (Celestial Steed). His home was in Shanghai. In the car Jo-an learned some things about conditions in Sinkiang.

"Do you stop at Urumchi, or do you go farther?" she asked.

"No, a German pilot takes over at Urumchi. I stop there and come back the following Wednesday."

When the car entered the city, she asked to be dropped at the square, and, putting on as nice a smile as she could, she thanked the pilot profusely.

The discovery of someone who made weekly trips between Urumchi and Lanchow and who might bring direct news from that remote world a thousand miles away was like a godsend. He had offered to be of service to her, and she knew it was important to befriend such a person.

The following Saturday, she received a note from Major Begt, asking her to go and see him. It had begun to snow, and the snow, instead of melting into a mush, except in the streets,

blanketed the surrounding mountains in a sparkling white when the sun came out. But Jo-an was hardly in a mood for enjoying the beautiful silvery landscape. She walked the short distance to the major's office. A mist of white feathery puffs swirled in the air and lighted noiselessly on her hair and face and neck. She could hear her heart pounding like a pump when she walked into the office. Major Beg glanced up at her flushed face. The skin around his mouth was drawn back tight and his brow was in furrows. His expression frightened her. He held a telegram in his hand.

"Tell me quickly, what is the news?"

"We have located Mr. Li. He is in Urumchi," and he slowly added, "in confinement."

He handed her the telegram. She glanced sharply down at the paper, trying to absorb what it meant. It was from the *Sinkungpao*. After repeated telegrams, the paper had finally got a reply from the governor's office. Li Fei had been caught in battle, working with Moslem rebels, and he was detained for reasons of public security. The text was formal and concise like all official communications. It did not say one word too much.

She sank into a cushioned rattan chair and gasped. "Then he is alive!"

"That is good news. It is the usual thing. Many people are thrown in jail for less reason. There is not much we can do, is there?"

Her lips were quivering. "Perhaps we can get in touch with him, at least to let him know that I am here."

"Not through this office, I am afraid. Anything coming from our side would only make it worse for him. We have to be extremely careful. He has to remain a neutral correspondent. He will have to sit it out. When the war is over, I am sure they will let him come back."

Her head swam when she left the major's office. She had feared the worst, but he was alive! It was cold depressing news, but definite, giving her hope of his eventual return. The news broke upon her like a silver lining behind a grey cloud which had darkened her sky. She was proud that she had come to Lanchow.

Back home, she thought at once of the pilot Pao. She must

see him, and induce him to search for Li Fei, and take a letter to him. What a lot she would have to say! But even if it was only a word from her, it would cheer him. She would be cheerful; she would tell him about the expected child, about how she was living here to wait for him—and about the death of Tsujen. And she would send him money. Surely he needed money.

Impatiently she waited for the following Wednesday. It was snowing hard and the streets were mushy and her fingers were numb and cold. She had hurriedly got away from the Chen family at quarter to seven, for she wanted to be ready and comfortable and look pretty when the pilot arrived.

Pao came into the reception-room at the airport, throwing his cap down on a table and straddling a chair. He opened his cigarette-case. It had been a rough, stormy journey. As he lighted his cigarette, his eye caught sight of the girl in the red coat, smiling steadily at him.

Jo-an came over to his table.

Pao smiled at her. "You want a ride home again?"

"Not exactly. I am in some trouble and I wonder if you can do something for me."

"Sit down. I will do anything I can for you." The appeal of Jo-an's smile upon him was irresistible.

She sat down. "I have to talk to you, because you are the only man I know who goes to Urumchi. Is it possible for you to look up somebody in jail in Urumchi?"

"In jail?"

"Yes. He is my husband."

He gulped down his coffee. "Wait a second," he said as he rose and went towards the office in quick strides. Her eyes followed him with a glow of gratitude in her heart. He was a broad-jawed man, with clear, alert eyes. A tuft of hair fell over his forehead as he bent over the counter and scribbled on some papers. All his movements were quick. He came back to the table and said: "Why don't you come with me to a restaurant? I am hungry as the devil. I'll be glad to help, but you will have to tell me more about your husband so that I can locate him."

A bright glow leaped into her eyes.

At the restaurant, she told him what she wanted him to do,

and as Pao listened, he got more and more interested in her story.

"You must tell him that you have seen me, that I am happy here, only waiting for him. The baby is due in two months. If you are so lucky as to find him, ask what he needs. Perhaps you can take some warm clothing from me to him."

Jo-an felt it necessary to take Pao into her confidence if he was to do such a great favour for her. She told him everything except that they were unmarried and that she was the niece of ex-mayor Tu Fanglin. Pao knew of the Sinkungpao, but he had never heard of Li Fei's name.

"You give me a letter before Friday. I shall be back next week and we will see what luck we have."

After dinner Jo-an said: "Why don't you come to my house? You can tell him you have seen where I live."

So Pao came home with her, and was surprised that such a prettily dressed girl was living in a shabby house. She showed him the baby crib she had bought, in her bedroom. Then she brought out the grey-blue sweater she had knitted and took out a hundred dollars, but he said: "You keep the money for the present. I do not know yet if I can find him. If he needs any money, I will advance it and let you know."

Before he left, he said: "I wouldn't advise you to go out to the airfield. The weather is usually rough this month and the plane may be held up for hours. I will come here."

When he left, she sank comfortably into her chair. She was grateful and happy. She had known there was always a way if she tried hard enough.

28

JO-AN WROTE A LONG LETTER TO FAN, TELLING HIM THE NEWS and asking him to transmit it to Li Fei's mother. She sent it care of Laolu, Fan's servant, according to his instructions, for she was completely in the dark as to where Fan was at present. The long absence of news about O-yun troubled her. O-yun should have arrived in Si-an by this time, for she had been gone for weeks. How was Fan going to help her, being in hiding

himself? She felt completely helpless. A sense of resentment against her uncle and her aunt surged through her and she wondered how they were feeling now that their son Tsujen was dead. In her anger she almost felt this to be just retribution for his life of greed and heartless seeking of his selfish ends.

The weather was getting bitterly cold, unusual even for Lanchow. Her only form of heating was the portable earthen stove that burned coal-balls in the little bedroom. As this was the only heated room, she and Tangma stayed there most of the time. The mornings were icy cold when they woke, for the fire died out during the night. A thick coating of frost always formed on the windows. Jo-an usually stayed in bed late while Tangma got up and brought in the stove full of red-hot coal-balls, which, being mixed with clay, burned very slowly and evenly. When the kettle was singing on the stove and hot water was ready, Jo-an got up. She did her washing now in her room instead of in the kitchen. The Yellow River was frozen, and the ice was thick enough for people to cross to the other side safely. Sometimes from her window she saw children playing on it. On the highway there was the same feverish activity, soldiers and carts always passing in large groups.

The baby was getting heavy and she found it more and more difficult to walk. Sometimes she got up with a back-ache. Ice had formed on many parts of the road, making it treacherous. Tangma always called a rickshaw for her when she went out to teach the Chen children. Mrs. Chen noticed her condition and asked: "When do you have to stop coming to us?"

Jo-an wanted to earn the money, for ten dollars loomed very large in her eyes. "I should be able to teach another month. This is only the beginning of December."

"I will talk with the children's father," said Mrs. Chen. "Perhaps we can cut the time down."

The next day the sky was cold and grey. A stiff north wind blew from the Mongolian desert through the gap on the east of the city, chilling everything by its touch. Jo-an's knuckles were red and her lips were blue. Mrs. Chen said: "I have spoken to the children's father. The weather is so raw. If you like, you can stop these lessons now."

"Oh, no. I should like to continue. It is not really unbearable and I come by rickshaw."

"I was thinking of you only. If you like, we can cut the lessons down to perhaps three times a week. Their father says if it is a question of money, we will be glad to pay you as usual."

The idea appealed to Jo-an. She wanted especially her Wednesdays to be free.

"It is very kind of you, Mrs. Chen. I will make it up to you after the baby is born."

They agreed that Jo-an was to come Tuesdays and Thursdays, and on Saturdays in mid-afternoon for an hour of coaching in calligraphy.

The visits to the Chen family were good for her, giving her something to do outside. She had found the work easy and pleasant, and it brought her enough to cover a great part of her monthly expenses. After the first excitement she settled down to quiescent waiting. She might have to live in Lanchow for a long time. Li Fei might need more money. Even if his family should send money to him, she would have to buy things for him. Money was terribly important to her! The winter months would be hard, but spring would come and everything would be easier. She was already planning to move into a better house after the baby came.

"Tangma, I envy you. You have no worries," she said one evening, as the two sat together warming their hands over the stove.

"No worries indeed! You give me worry enough."

"But you do not have to worry about money and food and clothing."

"That is true. I have seventy dollars saved up. Since I came to your family, I never have had to worry about food. I have bought land in my home village. When I am too old to serve you, I will go back to my village."

* * * * *

Fan's telegram came a few days later. He had notified Li Fei's mother and was coming up himself to see what could be done. There was another line: "O-yun's affair has been solved. Lang has come back. Will explain everything personally." She felt relieved, though she knew that Fan had a penchant for cryptic remarks.

All Wednesday she looked forward tensely to Pao's return.

She had been counting the days since Li Fei would have received her letter, if Pao had been able to see him.

A biting wind sucked through the valley, calling in hollow sounds over the mountain-tops, shaking snow from the trees and breaking the icicles. Every time there was a storm, the iron bridge across the river gave a singing sound which she could hear from her house. She was thankful that she did not have to go out tonight in this storm. She told Tangma to have a bowl of chicken noodles ready for the pilot.

From eight o'clock she sat listening for the drone of the plane and watching the dark sky outside her window for the lights of the plane. As she expected in this weather, the plane was two hours late, lashing its way through the Kansu storm.

It was another three quarters of an hour before she heard the sound of the car drawing up in front of her house. The rain pelted into the house when Pao dashed in. Quickly Tangma let him into the bedroom, lighted and warm for his welcome.

"I have seen Li Fei," he cried with a broad smile, as he hung up his raincoat.

Jo-an gasped in joy. "You have! Did he get my letter?" Her face flushed crimson with excitement.

"Yes," said Pao as he swung towards the bright charcoal fire and spread his hands above it. His boots scraped on the matted floor.

While Tangma went out to warm the noodles, Pao opened the flap of his jacket. "Here is a letter from him," he said. Jo-an snatched it from his hand and tore it open. Enclosed with it there was one for his brother and his mother. Pao watched her with satisfaction. The writing was in pencil in Li Fei's rapid scribble. Before she was half through, her eyes were misty and she could hardly make out the words. There was a long section about his past few months which she quickly skipped over, and the passages about his feelings for her were poetic, but she could read them later on.

"Tell me. How does he look? Is he all right?"

"He is in good health. There are two prisons in Urumchi and he is in the second one. He is in a cell with three other prisoners. He was surprised to have a visitor, and I was the first to visit him. I told him you sent me, of course. He asked all about you and I told him everything I knew."

"You gave him the sweater of course."

"Yes. The cell was cold but it was dry. I asked him if he wanted any money. He laughed and said he hardly had any use for money. I bought him a lambskin pallet and a new bed quilt. He said that was all he needed. You know they have only dirty grey blankets, one for each prisoner."

Tangma brought in the chicken noodles and, while Pao ate, Jo-an re-read the letter.

"I saw him twice," said Pao. "I am quite a friend of the jail officer now. A five-dollar tip, Nanking money, goes a long way. You had better tell me everything you want Li Fei to know. I didn't know you are the niece of the mayor of Si-an."

Jo-an shot a quick look at him.

"He told me that he considers himself married to you. He is thinking all the time of you. Now that I have seen you I can understand why."

Jo-an was sitting upright, looking into the fire, and its red glow was reflected on her face. A touch of sad thoughtfulness made her look like a young mother. She began to tell about her family and how she had come to live here.

"After Li Fei and I are reunited," she said, "we must buy you a big present."

"You will be reunited."

"What chance is there of the Moslems breaking into Urumchi?"

"One can never tell. They are already close by, and they are growing stronger every day. The governor is very unpopular with everybody, with the Chinese and with the White Russians under him. The Moslems are demanding his resignation and promise to stop fighting if he is overthrown. There is a chance that the Chinese officers or the White Russians may assassinate him one day. The last governor was assassinated at a banquet. Such things happen out there."

Jo-an went out the next day and spent seventy-five dollars on a black lamb coat lined with deep brown worsted to send to Li Fei, and wrote a long letter to him. The following morning she sent the parcel to Pao's hotel and blessed her fate for finding such a friend.

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At ten o'clock the next day Fan arrived, heavily muffled up to his neck and wearing an overcoat above his black Chinese gown. He looked about the little house. The bed had not yet been made up and the room was disorderly. Jo-an saw his look of disapproval.

"Lang should not have got you into such a shabby place," he said, "and it is freezing in here."

Jo-an asked Tangma to add some coal-balls to the fire, and they crackled and sent up a curling column of smoke. "It is not so bad," she said. Then her eyes fell on a black band around his sleeve, and she drew up suddenly.

"What are you wearing that for?" She pointed to the badge of mourning.

"For my adopted daughter," Wenpo answered briefly.

His face was suddenly taut and his lips formed a thin line. "I have failed," he said. "I didn't save her in time. I buried her last week on the river-bank near Tingkow. Jushui is back in Si-an. Her father has been sent for." He stopped short. Jo-an had never heard his voice so quivering with emotion. He evidently did not trust himself to tell the whole story, for he changed the subject immediately. "I came to see about Li Fei's affair."

She wanted to ask more about O-yun and how she had died, but she desisted for the moment and said:

"I have got in touch with him. The pilot brought a letter from him. He has seen him. He flew out last night again to Urumchi. It must have been the same plane by which you came."

She showed him Li Fei's letter and the letter for his mother, and told him all that Pao had told her.

Fan's eyes kept blinking. "How did you come to know this Pao?"

"I went again and again to the airport. This pilot noticed me. We got to talking and that was how it started."

Wenpo's nostrils expanded and he smiled his approbation. "You are wonderful, Jo-an. How did you come to think of it?"

"I did not think of it. I just felt that the planes were my only hope of communication. I just hung around long enough. Pao is a good man. He offered to do anything."

"Many a pilot would do the same thing for a girl like you."

"Now will you tell me about O-yun?"

He took out a cigarette and lighted it. "She jumped into the river," he said at length. "She died to protect all of us. Jushui and I had come back to Si-an. I inquired and got the information that the regular route for transporting prisoners was by a government junk down the Chingho River. O-yun must have walked for over three weeks under guard to the Shensi border. There she was handed over to the Shensi provincial gendarmerie. When I got the information, I got some of our men and went up in a boat. No, I didn't go up to save O-yun, but to save my own neck. I had to get her out of the clutches of the law. If she was forced to talk under torture, I would be lost. I didn't have enough confidence in her. I misjudged her. If I had only known, I should have gone to wait at the border."

He paused to puff at his cigarette. He was not very clear. He had seldom looked so downhearted and filled with such self-condemnation.

"What did you intend to do?" Jo-an was awed by his feeling and wanted to help him.

"I could have saved her. I had some of the best men with me, good swimmers. The government boat was easy to recognise by its red flag. During the voyage of two days and two nights, we would have our chance. Those guards are worthless. I don't believe they could swim. I was going to watch for our chance and ram the junk."

"Then what happened?"

"I was one day late. I figured we would meet her junk somewhere below Tingkow. No junk came down that way. When our boat got up to Tingkow, the guards' boat was lying along shore. She had given the guards the slip and had jumped into the water a short distance above. They had already found her body near the bridge and taken her out of the water. . . . I went up to the bailiff and claimed her body and buried her."

After a while he said: "She was much thinner. She couldn't have weighed more than ninety pounds. She must have walked for twenty-five days."

"How is Jushui?" she asked, to change the subject.

"He is back at my house, moaning over his loss. I didn't want him to go up the river with me. After I came back he went up to arrange for the transfer of her grave. Yes, he is free."

We are all free now because she wouldn't talk. She can't talk now," he added in a brittle, bitter tone.

Jo-an saw how deeply he felt the loss of O-yun and how bitter was his remorse. The arm-band was a voluntary expression of his sorrow. In cheating the court of a chance to try her, O-yun had cheated her friends of a chance to save her. Perhaps it was just as well. She had decided to spare herself gruelling torture, for she had said she would never tell. To Jo-an, who had seen O-yun laugh so gaily only two months ago, the blow struck very closely. Her throat tightened and she buried her face in her handkerchief.

* * * * *

Fan was persuaded to stay on until the pilot came back, since it was the main purpose of his trip to find out what could be done, and he wanted to talk with Pao.

Fan's coming gave Jo-an the feeling that she was not alone and left to struggle by herself, as she had felt in the last months. Her greatest surprise was some baby clothes which Fan brought. "It is a present from Chunmei."

Jo-an stared in astonishment. "But how did she send it to you?" She could not help feeling a sense of guilt for doubting Chunmei.

"She came alone to see me. Jo-an, you don't realise what a sister-in-law you have. She is probably the most remarkable woman I have ever seen. You can imagine my surprise when Laolu announced that a young lady from the Tafuti had come to see me."

Jo-an broke in: "What did she wear?"

His voice showed unusual enthusiasm. "She wore a Hunan beige crêpe, I think. Anyway, she looked exquisite. I never heard a person talk so perfectly. She apologised for the intrusion and then said you had told her I was your friend and Li Fei's friend. And then she looked rather shy, but she was not, really. 'Mr. Fan,' she said, 'you may misunderstand. I am a member of the Tu family, and should speak like one. I am speaking now as a Tu woman, but I do not say that everything the Tu family does is right. Jo-an is my third aunt, but I call her Jo-an. Again I don't say that everything Jo-an does is right. She has this baby with Li Fei. Of course it does not look nice

in the family. But ever since the old man drove her away, I have been feeling very uneasy. Domestic affairs are complex, and I won't bother you. But after all, she represents her father's line. The old man should have some respect for the memory of his brother. It was not right that the moment her father died she was driven away from the house. Ancestral property is sometimes a blessing and sometimes a curse. When I saw her leave our door I felt ~~very~~ very bad to let a young girl go out alone like that. I felt better when she told me that she was going to Lanchow with you. That is why I have come to you now. There is something I must explain. One day the old man asked me for Jo-an's address. He had heard from my popo that Jo-an was staying with the drum singer. It was my mistake that I had told her. The old man insisted on knowing where she was staying. I did not tell him, but he found the paper with her address that I had put away. I had no idea that he was going to stir up this trouble. You must believe me.' Finally she showed me the parcel of things she had bought for your baby and told me to explain to you. 'I give them to you,' she said. 'You send them to Jo-an. I don't want to know her address.'"

A tear was standing on the brim of Jo-an's eye and slowly rolled over. "I never thought that an in-law could be better and more considerate than blood kin in times of trouble."

"I think it is the good luck of the Tu family to have such a woman. That bastard your uncle doesn't deserve her."

"I am glad you appreciate her."

"Appreciate her! You don't know what a young woman with such charms does to a man when she talks to you like that. Heaven is blind. That old dog does not deserve her."

Something in Fan's tone of voice sounded dangerously romantic. Jo-an rigidly shut the idea out of her mind and asked about Sianghua. Fan said that he had not seen her because he did not attend Tsujen's funeral, but that he had heard that Sianghua was planning to go back to her parents in Shanghai.

Jo-an gave him Li Fei's letter to his mother.

"You haven't asked me about Mrs. Li," he said.

Jo-an bent her head. "I feel so embarrassed. I suppose you have told her."

"I have."

"I suppose she must think contemptuously of me now. I have no face to see her. You know I didn't go to say good-bye to her."

"I must be frank with you. It hurt her deeply. She asked me why you had to leave so suddenly, and I had to tell her."

"What did she say?"

"She said she didn't know what to think, then she said she didn't think her son could do such a thing."

"Do you think she can ever forgive me? She was so good to me, but I suppose she must have changed her opinion of me entirely."

"She is a kind woman. After all, the child in your body will bear the surname of Li. I will talk to her when I go back. After all, you are doing so much for her son. When I went to see her after receiving your letter and told her how you had come here and tried single-handed to locate her son, I think she said something like 'Poor child'. After all, you and she are the two women who love Li Fei most. Trouble may bring you together again."

"I am sure I dare not see her until Li Fei comes back."

Fan stayed until Wednesday, when the pilot came back. Jo-an asked Fan to come to her house and introduced him. After hearing about Li Fei, Fan asked Pao questions about the war in Sinkiang. The general impression was that the war seemed to be turning in favour of the Moslems and that they were mustering enough strength to storm Urumchi itself. The Manchurian general Sheng was a superior commander in the field, but the Chinese high command was weak and lacking in decision, torn by internal jealousies and distrust of its own officers, while the Moslems fought with increasing bitterness because they either had to win or be exterminated piecemeal. Of all the men under him, Governor Chin trusted only his own brother. And he was right. Murmurings of discontent among the staff and the White Russian regiment were rife. Few people were loyal to him.

Fan was satisfied when he left the following day that everything possible was being done. Li Fei would have to accept his fate until the situation changed. Fan gave Jo-an two hundred dollars and told her to write to him in case of need. He had gone with her to see the Moslem major, and her doctor, and the hospital where she was to go at the time of her confinement.

THE TIME WAS DRAWING NEAR FOR THE YOUNG EXPECTANT mother. All the baby's things were ready, down to the knitted coverlet.

Now she was getting a letter from Li Fei every week. He was even able to joke about his prison food and to tell stories of his cell-mates and to boast about his progress in learning Turki words. He expected little chance to get out until the situation radically changed. Pao had been able to tell him some news about the war, but his mind seemed to be occupied with the inner world of the prison, except for the affairs of his own immediate family. He complained that he was always hungry. Jo-an took that to mean that he was in good health. Along with letters to her, he always sent letters to his brother and his mother, which Jo-an duly forwarded.

Shortly before New Year's Eve a number of Tungan officers returned to Lanchow for the holidays. The stormy weather was over and Lanchow was enjoying beautiful sunny days. The air was cold but dry, and the mountains and forests were covered with snow. Jo-an saw Hakim at his office and asked about the war, and Hakim laughed. "Chin is in a mouse-trap." She asked when Ma Chungying was going to move his troops, but Hakim refused to say anything.

The next day she received a surprise visit from Tantse. His agile body was clad in a quilted uniform and his fur-lined cap sat like a burr on his head, making him look still taller.

"You are a handsome soldier." She looked at the three brass triangles on his collar. There was nobody she was more pleased to see except Li Fei. "What are you?"

"Captain," said Tantse proudly.

"How did you know my address?"

"I got it from Hakim. I am a regular member of his staff." Then his face was grave when he added: "I didn't know your father had died till quite recently. I wore mourning for him for a month. I owe my life to your father. Miriam wrote to me about the death of your cousin, too."

"It was an accident, wasn't it? I was told that a dog pounced upon him. He tripped and fell over the dam."

Tantse looked at her with quiet amusement. "Yes, he fell over the dam, but that wouldn't kill him. What do you think happened?"

"Come, tell me."

"What would happen? Mizra just picked up a boulder and gently dropped it on his skull. I think Azal and others kicked some more boulders down to bury him. When the bailiff came, the whole village swore that it was an accident. What could they do? There you have the true story."

After this the two exchanged many items of news.

"What are you doing for New Year's Eve?" Tantse asked.

"The family I am tutoring in wanted me to come to dinner with them. I haven't decided yet."

"Keep it for me, will you?"

His eyes were bright and upon his lips there was the carefree smile she had known in their childhood.

"Very gladly."

Tangma had been standing near. "Jo-an," she said, "you have been talking about moving. Why don't we ask Tantse to help us while he is here?"

Jo-an explained. Nothing would please Tantse more than to be able to do something for her. He spent two whole days looking for suitable rooms. The second afternoon he was able to show Jo-an and Tangma a house inside Kwangyuan Gate. It was in a crowded street blocked off by neighbours' houses, but the house was clean and had wooden floors. The windows and the wooden fixtures were of good quality, with provision against the cold. Only one side of the house was to let. When they went to see the rooms the sun was shining upon the tiny inside courtyard. The landlady agreed to put an old rug on the floor. Jo-an decided at once.

It was December the twenty-eighth when they moved into the new house, Tantse helping with the packing and moving, and late in the afternoon they were comfortably settled. The baby crib was placed in a sunny corner, and Tangma had a room by herself.

When New Year's Eve came, they had a delicious dinner at home. Learning that Pao was in town, Jo-an asked him to join

them. She had letters from Wenpo and Chunmei, and Pao brought a letter from Li Fei, in which he suggested that the child should be called 'Lansheng', meaning 'born at Lanchow'.

The din of fire-crackers filled the air of the busy neighbourhood. They had their own lighted, too, before dinner. Standing in the yard, they looked up at the starlit sky. A shooting star fell through the sky.

"Tantse," said Jo-an, "do you believe in the story about the shooting stars? You told me when we were children that the genii are always trying to storm into heaven and these shooting stars are sent by the angels to keep them away."

"I still do."

They went in to dinner in a happy frame of mind. Red candles were burning, giving the room a festive air, and Li Fei's photograph stood in the middle of a table.

After dinner Jo-an asked Tantse: "What are the chances of Ma Chungying's army fighting its way into Urumchi?"

"I would bet that Urumchi will be in our hands by the spring."

Tantse went on to talk about the people from the village. He had met Hassan, brother of Sohrab and Miriam, who was thought to have been killed. Aqil had been conscripted. Tantse also confided the information that although Ma Chungying's own army, nearly seven thousand strong, had not yet been put in the field, many Moslem recruits had joined the troops at the front, and Ma had been sending ammunition supplies by the southern route through Korla.

"Tantse, I suppose you will be going with the army when it moves, and you can do an important thing for me. You and Hakim must arrange to save Li Fei." Turning to Pao, she asked: "You tell him just where the prison is."

Pao told him that the prison was near Sitachiao, where the Moslem population lived.

"From the stories I have heard," said Pao, "Li Fei is safer inside the prison than outside. The slaughter will be terrible when the fighting breaks out in the city. I am sure Ma Shih-ming will break into the prison and rescue the Moslem prisoners."

"I will speak to Hakim about it," Tantse said. "It is likely that Ma Shih-ming will capture the capital before we arrive."

* * * *

When Fan returned to Si-an, filled with admiration for Jo-an, he went to see Mrs. Li. Worry for her son had constantly hung upon the mother's mind ever since Li Fei went to Sinkiang. During October and the greater part of November she had not even known where Fan was. When she learned through Fan that her son was in prison, she was greatly distressed.

"Poor child," she said to Fan. "It worries me day and night to think that he must be freezing in that prison cell in this bitter winter."

Fan's triangular eyelids lifted a little and he drew an audible sigh. "It is Jo-an who is the poor child. She spared herself comforts to send him a fur coat. It is deep winter in Lanchow. I found her living in a little hovel for twelve dollars a month, with just a portable stove to heat a bedroom crowded with two beds. Tangma is living with her in the same room. She is economising to save money for your son."

The mother's eyes flashed. "Is that true? It was cruel of her uncle to drive her away like that."

"Mrs. Li," said Fan, looking straight into the mother's sad face. "Where would you find a girl so faithful to your son? First, she chose to live up there to be near the source of news, in order to find him. It was wonderful of her to find the pilot. I wouldn't have thought of doing it. She went far out to the airport on cold, stormy nights every time a plane came in, in order to overhear news about Sinkiang. She was there so often that people noticed her. That was how she got to know the pilot. Second, she went to the office of the Thirty-Sixth Division and got a Moslem colonel to send telegrams and trace your son. Third, having failed to trace him on the Moslem side, she got his newspaper to help. That was how she found out that Li Fei is in Urumchi. She is doing more than any of us can do or has done for your son. I think there are not many such modern girls. She loves Li Fei and loves him constantly through all this trouble. That is what I call real constancy."

Fan's little speech had its desired effect. "Quieteta!" said the mother with a sigh. This meant that Jo-an had done something admirable, something not many people would be able to do. "When I think about it, I see it was my son's fault."

"When is she expecting the baby?" asked Tuanerh.

"She is due next month."

"However you look at it, the child is of our blood. Mother, I think you should do something about it."

"What you say is right, Tuanerh. If she had come to me and told me, I would have understood."

"Mother, how could a girl in her position come and speak to the lover's mother about such a thing? It is we who should take the first step."

In the first week of January, the mother received the first letter from Jo-an, who had taken the latest news about Li Fei as her excuse for writing. Her letter was restrained.

Dearest Taitai,

You must have received the news about your son from Mr. Fan and he must have told you everything. I have forwarded several letters from your son, and I trust you have received them. Pao, the pilot, has been wonderful. I invited him to dinner on New Year's Eve to show my appreciation. He saw your son only ten days ago. I am writing to tell you that Fei is well and is not in need of anything. He does not enclose any letter for you this week, so I am writing in his stead. What I want to tell you is that the news about the war gives us some hope. I am in touch with some Moslem officers from Sunganor who are my old friends. It looks as if the Moslems will be inside Urumchi soon. I have asked the colonel to telegraph to Ma Shih-ming, the Moslem commanding general. Ma Shih-ming is Li Fei's friend. Colonel Hakim has agreed to send my request in his own name. If Ma Shih-ming should fight his way into Urumchi, he will liberate the Moslem prisoners and will take special care to rescue your son. This is all I can do and all I am praying for. The rest is just waiting.

I shall be going into the hospital in about three weeks, and hope everything will go well.

Taitai, you must not think I have forgotten you. I do think of you all the time and remember your great kindness to me. Take good care of yourself, and give my best regards to Saotse.

Your unworthy,
Jo-an.

The mother had the letter read to her by her elder son.

"Ping, what do you think?"

"I think she is wonderful."

"I am thinking," said the mother. "The baby will soon be born, and it will be my grandchild. No matter what anyone may say, blood kin is blood kin. If she had a home to go to we could wait. But she has been driven away from her home, and it does not seem right to leave her there suffering alone. She seems a constant girl. Even if she made a mistake, my own son is at fault. If she could come to our house before Fei returns, I could at least help to take care of the child and give her the comforts of this home. It would be very unusual, so you must tell me what you think, both of you."

"I certainly think we should invite her, whether she will accept or not," said Tuanerh.

"What do you think, Ping?"

"I don't think it is so unusual. The 'child daughter-in-law' was quite a common custom until recent years. You could consider her as a child *shifu* brought up in our own house. Under the circumstances it seems the only right thing to do. She may feel it too awkward to accept, but at least we should make the offer."

Jo-an received a letter signed by Li Fei's mother which was conceived in general terms of sympathy and appreciation and ended with the proposal that as soon as the baby could travel, she should come to live with them, and that Li Ping would be glad to come up and bring her home. Jo-an was profoundly touched. The invitation meant that she was accepted by Li Fei's family. But what would they tell their neighbours? She knew that Li Fei had not suggested this. She would write at once to him and ask what he thought. She rather felt that she ought not to go until she could return with Li Fei. What story they told then would not matter.

In the third week of January she went into the hospital, registering as 'Mrs. Li'. She gave her father's name and mother's name. She did not care any more. She took Li Fei's photograph with her and was proud to show it to the nurses. One of the nurses who had read Li Fei's articles treated her with extra courtesy and warmth.

It was three o'clock when she went into the hospital. Towards

supper-time the pains came on more frequently. At eleven o'clock at night she was taken into the delivery-room and the baby was born shortly after midnight.

Tangma was sitting in Jo-an's room when she came to in the early hours of the morning. "Is it a boy or a girl?" Jo-an asked at once.

"A boy," said Tangma. "He weighs seven and a half pounds."

The young mother smiled in her semi-consciousness and went into sleep again.

All through the following days she had a feeling of exultation that it was over and she had done what she wanted to do. She almost made herself believe that she had planned it all because it was so right to have a child with the man she loved.

Little Lansheng had plenty of hair and the sparkle of his father's eyes, and his mouth was small and well-formed. Hearing the baby's lusty cries made her feel that all the shame and suffering she had gone through had been wiped away.

Feeding him at her breast and smoothing his wisps of hair, she said to Tangma: "Tangma, do you remember one of the most foolish things we ever tried to do?"

"No, what do you mean?"

"Do you remember how I took those herbs? I am so glad they did not hurt my boy."

She had asked her nurse to send a telegram to Mrs. Li. To her surprise, she received messages of congratulations not only from her, but also from Chunmei and Sianghua, besides those from Fan and Lang.

"Tangma, do you think we should return to Si-an?"

"It is very difficult to say. You are nearer the child's father here and perhaps you can be of help to him. But if it is going to be for a long time, it is better for you to live in his home. In any case the baby is not fit to travel for a few weeks yet. So there is no hurry to decide."

Book VI

THE RETURN

30

ON HIS NEXT VISIT PAO BROUGHT JO-AN SOME DISCONCERTING news. Urumchi was under martial law. The terrible revenge a Chinese Brigadier-General Shung had inflicted upon the people of Shanshan, slaughtering everyone suspected of joining the rebels, had struck the initial spark, and the piling up of atrocities as the Manchurian Sheng went about in his punitive expeditions had fanned the flame of Moslem rebellion into national proportions covering the length and breadth of Sinkiang. Sheng had recaptured Shanshan and Turfan and had driven the Moslems into the mountains.

The war had been turned into a war of populations. The peaceful sea of Mohammedan humanity had been whipped by the storms of anger and hatred into a fearful, tumultuous flood, threatening to engulf its oppressors. From Aksu in the west to Hami in the east, the Chinese Moslems and the Turkis joined common cause. Chinese and Turkis alike feared racial riots in their own cities. Sheng had driven Ma Shih-ming to Karashar, but when he retreated, the Moslems took over Turfan again.

"The streets are dead," said Pao. "When I landed at the airfield I was warned not to go into the city. I went, however, with a German pilot, depending on our Eurasia caps and uniforms as our best guarantees of safety."

"Did you see Li Fei?"

"I did. But let me tell you. All the city gates were closed except the East Gate. We got through on the strength of our uniforms. All shops were closed. Civilian volunteers were patrolling the streets. Most of the soldiers had been sent out. There was a notice forbidding people to spread rumours or to

move about. I was told a great number had moved from the suburbs into the city for safety. We crossed the park on our way to the Eurasia office and saw four dead bodies outside the county magistrate's office. I was told that these were 'turbaned heads' (Turkis) who had been accused of murdering a Chinese family of five in the country and had been caught and executed. We saw some White Russians in shabby uniform. Then we went to the Sitachiao section where Li Fei's prison is. There was fear on everybody's face. Sitachiao is the big street, almost half a mile long, where the Moslem community lives, with a few Chinese. Everybody—the Chinese, the Moslems, the White Russians—everybody was afraid of a racial riot. Nobody wanted one, but everybody thought one was coming. I went into the prison."

"How was it at the prison?"

"The commanding officer himself, a Chinese about forty, was in fear of his life. The Moslems might at any time storm the prison to rescue their men. It was a touch-and-go situation."

"Did Fei know what was going on?"

"He had some idea. I told him not to stir out of the prison, for it would be safer inside. I told him that Ma Shih-ming had been asked to take care of him, and that he should wait in prison until a Moslem officer came to look for him. He kept on asking me how you were and if I would continue to come and see him, and I told him I would as long as I could. I slept in the Eurasia office that night and left the next morning. I preferred to breathe the free air outside. Food is expensive and prices are sky-rocketing. Rice is almost unobtainable. The staff of our office are eating wheat cakes and salted turnips. The entire countryside, with a few exceptions, is in the hands of the Moslems. They have burned the army stores of rice in several towns. Urumchi is in a state of siege, and it won't be long before they attempt a direct attack."

Pao was able to see Li Fei only once more, in the following week. This time he could not take any letters. A tight censorship had been clamped down on the mails. Dynamite had been found hidden in the park. The authorities, discovering that Moslem business men were sending out news, just confiscated or held up the mails. Some Moslem merchants had sent orders for cloth, with the names of colours, blue, red, yellow, green,

standing for the names of different towns, and others had sent out empty envelopes, meaning that the city was 'empty' of soldiers. Pao had asked Jo-an to send her message orally through him. She was now principally worried about Li Fei's money for him to make the journey back successfully. She gave Pao three hundred dollars to take to him, leaving herself a margin of a hundred dollars.

The day before Pao arrived, Turfan was retaken by the Moslem levies. Sheng was fighting his way through a flood of racial animosities. He was victorious wherever he struck. But he had only a few thousand men, and even that little corner of Sinkiang in the Hami-Turfan-Urumchi area was too big for him to defend. The Mohammedan flood always closed in along his line of retreat. Dawancheng was taken and lost again and, nearer by, the post office and county magistrate's office in Changchi had been set afire. There was a semblance of order when local riots were quickly suppressed, but the people were restive, and many of the officers and magistrates could not be depended upon. It was whispered that General Chang Pei-yuan had been ordered to bring his troops from Ili, five hundred miles away. Would he come, and, if he did, on whose side would he throw in his lot? Besides, the situation at Aksu and Kuchar was insecure, and the revolt promised to extend to the south of Tianshan. General Sheng, in driving Ma Shih-ming to the mountains between Urumchi and Karashar, had only scattered the sparks which were to light up a conflagration which spread in the course of the next year to the very western extremities of Sinkiang on the Soviet border.

The air pilot was one of those privileged to go through the city gate without much trouble. The respect that aviators received from the guards was natural. There was not a high officer in Urumchi who did not try to befriend the staff of the Eurasia office.

Pao practically forced his way past the prison officer, who had strict orders not to let anyone communicate with the prisoners, since there were some Turki officials among them who used to occupy high positions at the court of the king of Hami. When the officer tried to stop him, Pao said: "Look here, I am visiting my Chinese friend, not a Moslem. You do me a favour and some day I may do you a favour. You may

want to get out of this rat-hole and return to China yourself. You can come along and stand by while I talk to him."

The officer led the way to Li Fei's cell. Very briefly Pao said: "Your wife has given birth to a baby boy. I have seen him."

"How is she?" Li Fei cried.

"She is very well, and she has moved into a better house. Here is her new address."

"Please tell her to go and live with my mother. I shall feel better."

When Pao handed him the three hundred dollars he pressed Pao's hand silently. The light from the window cast an oblique light on his profile, which seemed to have become thinner than when Pao had first seen him. His voice choked as they said farewell.

On the next trip Pao was not able to get into the city at all. There had been some fighting close by and the neighbourhood of Changchi and Tch-hua was in seething disorder. The plane stopped only long enough for refuelling and change of pilots, and Pao had to stay at the airfield.

On February 21 the forty-six-day siege of Urumchi began. Early in the morning the sound of artillery shook the roofs. A few days before, some six hundred Turkis had approached the city from the south. They had come as far as the city wall but had been beaten back by White Russian troops. Other troops had come over from Karashar and, joined by the Turki volunteers, had stealthily marched to the Hungshanchui (Red Hill Gap) without being discovered. They were fifteen hundred strong, mounted on horseback, provided with two field-guns, a few machine-guns, and some six hundred rifles. The majority of the Moslem horsemen were armed with scimitars, sabres and spears. The guards on the Red Hill Gap directly overlooking the city, ill-disciplined and untrained in battle, were caught in their sleep during the night and annihilated. Other troops had occupied the Yaomoshan (Devil's Mount) and Chihchushan (Spider Hill). Before the morning was well advanced the radio station outside the city at Siaochiaochang (Moslem Field) had been taken over by the attackers.

Li Fei, shut up in his cell, heard the booming of artillery and the intermittent rattle of machine-guns all day. The inmates

of the prison, all Mohammedans, were gabbling with excitement, cursing and laughing and jumping about, all hoping for their liberation. Li Fei knew that his safety lay with the Moslems. He knew well enough that nine-tenths of the inhabitants of the province were either Tungans or Turkis. He had learned enough Turki to make his way across the country if necessary.

Towards evening the firing died away. He went to bed without taking off his clothes. The next morning the sound of the guns came nearer. The government troops were firing volley after volley from the city wall in an attempt to retake the Red Hill Gap. From the distance came the boom of answering artillery. Some shells crashed into the houses in the neighbourhood and shook the ground. Then in the afternoon the crackle of machine-guns seemed to come from another direction, as if the fighting had shifted to the radio station. Some three hundred White Russians, inured to battle, had rushed the Red Hill Gap and retaken it. The attackers, having lost their hill positions, dashed towards the city suburbs. The Mohammedan community of Sitachiao welcomed the Moslem horsemen with an uproar. The Manchurian general was held up at Liutaowan, and there were only seven hundred defending troops, including the White Russians. Outside the prison compound Li Fei heard the tramping of horses, the howls of men, the screams of women, and the crackle of rifle shots. Fire had started in some houses and from the prison windows they could see columns of smoke. A bullet cracked through the roof. Then a lull followed, broken only by occasional sniping shots. The Moslem attackers had occupied Sitachiao and had taken up positions in houses and a near-by cotton-mill. By five o'clock the cavalry had advanced to the park.

Now there was seething commotion in the prison. Some inmates were trying to create disorder and set up a succession of calls and yells to distract the officers' attention, hoping to lure them into their cells. But the officers were not in sight. The crowd started to smash the doors down. One of the heavy wooden doors in a cell near Li Fei's fell from its hinges, and seven or eight prisoners rushed out. Other doors gave way. Then a machine-gun chattered in the outside yard. The officers had taken up their positions in the stone gate-house. Three or

four prisoners fell dead in the yard and the others retreated. But more and more prisoners now gathered in the dark corridor. The older men were stroking their beards and touching their hands to their chests, occupied in prayer. The younger men were for rushing out and storming the gate-house by their numbers. Fifty or sixty men were milling about the place, while five or six women cowered in a corner.

An old man wearing a skull-cap and a long loose coat began to speak. He counselled waiting until dark. The sun would be setting in an hour. The old man's quiet, firm voice impressed the prisoners.

The commotion subsided a little. Some squatted on the hall floor and waited, others moved about restlessly. The officers stayed at their post outside, with the muzzle of the machine-gun pointed towards the prison door. Some of the prisoners were arming themselves with table legs, brass door-knobs and chairs, anything to fight with.

The distance from the prison door to the stone gate-house was some thirty feet. It was conceivable that if a sufficient number of men rushed the gate, some would reach it. The prison yard was surrounded by a wall about thirty feet high. From a small tower on the top of the prison building, slit windows overlooked the yard. No guard was up there now. From the tower they could observe the officers at the gate. Four men were organised to take up their positions, and a steady stream of the oddest objects was passed up and stored on the floor of the watch-tower. Meanwhile a band of the younger men was organised to slip out into the central court on the back, file out around the end of the building, and come upon the front yard by the narrow passages along the wall on both sides.

Li Fei went up to the small tower. The sky was reddened in the south-west corner where some houses were burning sending red sparks into the air. The prison yard lay in the dusk. A solitary lantern shone from the gate-house, and he could see the heads of two officers, sitting with hunched shoulders. Another guard was standing just outside flashing a streak of white light about the yard.

At a silent signal a heavy door-knob crashed into the gate-house. The officers jumped up in astonishment and the

machine-gun began to splutter. More table legs, bars, boots and bricks began to fly. The flashlight jerked nervously across the yard. Suddenly a burning skull-cap fell into the middle of the dark yard and, at the signal, some twenty men rushed out from the alleyways on both sides of the building and made a dash for the gate-house. With wooden bars and bricks they had wrenched from the building, they fell upon the officers. One was smashed on the head and crumpled down on the floor. The others were tied up with their hands behind their backs and gagged. Other prisoners came up and, in blind fury, kicked and clubbed them to death. Li Fei saw ten or twelve men lying in the yard. The machine-gun, cocked at an angle, was silent, a little smoke curling in the dim light of the lantern.

Now all the prisoners, men and women, were rushing into the yard, each with his little parcel of clothing. Those ahead had taken the keys from the dead officers and opened the gate. Some were crying over the dead, others were pulling and helping the wounded, of whom four or five were still alive.

Li Fei rushed out with the rest. His first instinct was to seek safety outside the gate. Then he went back and snatched a skull-cap from one of the dead men. The lantern revealed the prostrate bodies of the guards with hideous, gory gashes on their heads and necks.

The February wind was cold. He put on the skull-cap and pulled his collar close around his neck and went out. The ground sloped downward towards an ancient drill ground. The sounds of sniping had died down completely and the night was quiet. He had no idea where he was. He could make out the hazy forms of some old willow trunks along a small creek, and a square sentry-box no bigger than a booth. On his left was a street with a few lights shining from the houses. He went towards the willows and sat on the ground, believing that it was best not to go into the street. He remembered then that he had been told to stay in the prison and wait for someone to take him out. How was he to find the Moslem officer? Would the man ever come?

Unobserved in the shadow of the old trees, he tried to think what he should do next. Then he saw several men in high boots go in through the gate and, after a moment, come out lugging the machine-gun. Just as they came out, a squad of

ten or twelve soldiers, led by a man on horseback, met them. From their white turbans Li Fei judged they were Turkis or Tungans. There was a shout and sabres gleamed. The Chinese patrols were cut down and their bodies lay on the street. The squad turned into the prison.

Li Fei seized his chance and walked towards the prison. Two 'turbaned heads' were standing outside. He shouted in Turki. They commanded him to halt. He put up his hands and walked slowly towards them. Passing the dead bodies, he noticed that they were not in uniform.

Li Fei went up and explained that he had escaped from the prison. While he was talking, a short fat Turki with a chinful of black beard came out.

"I am a friend of General Ma Shih-ming," he said quickly. He took out his name card.

"Ah, you are the man I have been looking for. I have instructions to send you to Ma Shih-ming."

"Where is he?"

"Some thirty miles from here, on the Nanshan mountain."

Li Fei gave a long sigh of relief.

In the dark the party went through the dead, silent streets, proceeded to the Sitachiao district, and went into the cotton-mill occupied by the Moslem troops. The commanding officer said to him:

"We have this job to finish here. I cannot spare a man to go along with you, but I am responsible for your safety. You will be safe if you go towards the south. I will give you a pass. When you meet any of our men, they will be able to tell you where Ma Shih-ming is."

The next morning Li Fei was just preparing to get away when artillery fire began. Shells dropped in the Sitachiao district and set fire to the houses. Then came an unbelievable scene of destruction. The entire Mohammedan settlement was set afire. Houses burned and collapsed, sending up billows of blue smoke. Shells rained and machine-guns from the ramparts began to mow down the fleeing men and women and children. The Moslems realised that their position was untenable and began to evacuate the city. Men, women and children crowded the road to the Nanshan hills. When the day was over, the battle around Sitachiao had cost the lives of two thousand civilians,

ten times the number the soldiers killed on both sides. The district lay in a heap of charred ruins.

Li Fei had gone ahead, but all day he saw more and more soldiers and refugees retreating towards the hills.

* * * * *

"It is not safe for you to go about like this," said Ma Shih-ming. "I will give you a Tungan uniform. The fighting is spreading west along the south side of Tienshan. You had better go and wait at Turfan. My cousin is in control of the Moslem troops there. There are only a handful of Mongolian troops in the Chinese town, under the Mongol prince of Karashar, and there is not much fighting there. Hami is still blocked, but General Ma Chungying is getting ready to move and join forces with us. I am moving about. Urumchi is already encircled. If we don't capture the city by force, we can starve the enemy out until they surrender."

The first thing Li Fei did on his arrival at Turfan was to ask the brigade commander, Ma Fu-ming, to send a message to Hakim, asking him to forward it to Jo-an telling her of his escape. He said he did not expect to make his way back until the situation had improved and the road through Hami was clear.

The days were bitterly cold and at night the desert winds swept over the plains. The wells had run dry and the inhabitants swept snow from their yards to cook and wash with. Li Fei, tired and ragged, was glad to find a temporary haven of safety and breathe the air of freedom once more.

Something went very deep into his heart when he looked back upon all that Jo-an had done for him. How much he owed to her! He realised to the fullest extent not only the depth of their love, but also the qualities of that quiet, dreamy, retiring girl he had met a year ago. "Love can be a beautiful thing," she had said. He knew now fully what it meant, it was a courageous and strong thing, as well as gracious and selfless. He had not seen her for many months. He had in his mind an image of her as exquisite as she was capable of great sacrifices. He felt that this love she had shown through the trials of the past year was no mortal thing, that it had a careless abandon and an insistent, wholehearted quality which shone like a white

flame that enveloped him and illuminated his way as well as warmed him. When would he be able to prove his enduring love as she had proved hers? He was seized with a mad longing to return to her as quickly as possible, to see her face and hear her voice.

He did not care about the severe conditions of living. He had not tasted rice for months, and was getting used to drinking horses' milk and taking mutton for his meals. He even followed the Mohammedan custom of washing his face without a basin. In the morning he went out into the yard, picked up snow, and rubbed his face with it. He dreamed about the luxury of a hot bath.

Curiously, the city of Turfan had been spared, though it had been taken and retaken several times. While Ma Shih-ming was here, he had strictly forbidden racial riots, and there had been no savage reprisals. The streets were crowded with refugees, many of whom passed their nights in the covered bazaars. The provincial currency had depreciated to fifty taels to one Chinese dollar, and Li Fei found that he did not have to spend much, for one dollar went a long way.

During his second week in Turfan he met in the commander's office a young and handsome Tungan officer in a creased grey quilted uniform. His face was familiar. While he was talking with the commander, the young officer glanced at him several times. When the conversation was over, he came over to Li Fei with a look of recognition and said: "Why, it is you, Mr. Li! I am Tantse." Li Fei recalled at once that he had met him at Sunganor, and stood up quickly in happy surprise.

"What are you doing here?"

"I brought a message to Commander Ma from General Ma Chungying."

"But how? Did you come from Hami?"

Tantse answered with a smile: "I arrived at Hami in February." Light danced in his eyes. "It is good to see you. I saw Jo-an at Lanchow. I had dinner with her on New Year's Eve."

Ma Fu-ming came over and said: "Mr. Li is trying to get back to Lanchow. Perhaps you can take him on the way back." And then to Li Fei: "He knows how to get through."

When the two young men stepped out of the office, Tantse said: "Come with me, we must lunch together."

They went into a restaurant in the busy section of the New City, where there were Chinese shops and a few others opened by Russian merchants. Over a bare table, where they ate barley cakes and fried mutton, Li Fei told how he had escaped from Urumchi, and Tantse told him of his holidays in Lanchow and how he had helped Jo-an to move into a better house. "She was expecting a baby pretty soon when I left."

"The baby was born—a boy."

"I didn't know! I left for Suchow soon after the New Year."

"How did you get through?" Li Fei asked.

Tantse chuckled, jerking his head. "It is very simple when you are a Turki and can talk the language. The whole countryside belongs to our people. The Chinese soldiers live within their barracks. They hardly dare leave the towns and, when they do, they always move in large companies. There are quite a few people from our village who are at Chiktam, anxious to go back. They were afraid to go near Hami and are hiding in a village. Without pack animals, they wouldn't dare cross the desert. They have been here for about a year. Some of them were wounded near Shanshan. I have promised to go home with them."

Li Fei's hopes were raised. "And you are taking them across the Gobi yourself?"

"It is only about ten days across the desert and there are three or four stations on the way. After the first station, there are no Chinese sentries. I expect Hami to be all clear soon. When I left Hami ten days ago, the Chinese were dismounting their radio station. I saw a lot of signs that they were coming west." And then Tantse asked with a laugh: "If you go with me, have you a strong stomach?"

Li Fei answered that he had seen enough slaughter, if that was what Tantse meant.

"That is what you will see. Corpses of men, women and children, lying in the snow, sometimes seventy or eighty of them in a heap. It made me sick the first time I saw it. Now I just pass them by without a thought. This war is getting to be senseless. I am a Turki. I know that some of those Chinese women and children were murdered by us. But the Chinese

have done worse. What does all this amount to? I have seen enough of it. Rahman and Aqil and Sohrab—they all want to go home.”

“Can they get leave?”

“You know how it is after a battle. Nobody checks where you are, in this kind of war. They came out here last summer. They were with Ma Fu-ming for some six months and have seen some of the worst fighting. Ma will let them go if I speak to him about it. He is in need of ammunition, not of manpower. I just want to make it formal and get them papers, so that they can travel with the army caravan.”

Tantse took Li Fei to see the Turki house where some of the officers were billeted, and showed him his bedroom, which was below ground-level and was dry and warm. Most of the houses in Turfan had underground rooms where their inhabitants escaped the intense heat in summer. In this rich valley, lying in a low basin at sea-level, the heat was known to have gone above a hundred and twenty degrees. The country was now lying in snow, but the weather had turned mild and the snows were melting and flooding some of the streets.

On the third day Tantse had obtained all the papers that he wanted, and they started for Hami. As they strode along the old caravan route, talk returned constantly to Jo-an.

“She is a wonderful girl,” said Tantse. “I found her living in a miserable house on the bank of the river before I found her another.”

Li Fei listened to every word. Jo-an had never written him about these things. The pilot had told him a little, but he wanted to know everything that Jo-an had gone through, what kind of house she lived in, how much she earned with her tutoring, how she looked.

“She’s got a tortoise for an uncle, who drove her away from home after her father died. He would be glad to be rid of her entirely and get hold of her father’s property.”

Tantse went on to tell him about the death of Tsujen. “I get letters from home once in a long while,” Tantse said. “Miriam writes to me, and when one of us gets a letter we share the news with each other.”

“What is happening?”

“After Tsujen was killed, the bailiff came, but the authorities

could do nothing about it. Then soldiers came to patrol the lake and protect the dam. The last I heard was that two soldiers completely disappeared." Tantse lowered his voice. "How they disappeared you can guess. The situation at home, on a smaller scale, is something like what is happening out here. Blood will be paid with blood. I am afraid there is going to be some shooting when we go home. Now our men are away from the village and the soldiers can do what they like. But when we go back, it is going to be different. That is one of the reasons why Rahman and the others are so anxious to go."

The town of Shanshan was a mass of charred and toppled débris. During the occupation the inhabitants, largely Turki, had fled to Lukchun and Kara-Khodji and the villages to the south. Shanshan had been a prosperous little town. Pichan wine was famous, for that was the name of Shanshan among the local people. It was famous too for its grapes and cotton and wool, and when the people heard that the soldiers had left for the north, moving towards the Tienshan passes, they began to come back to their roofless houses, salvaging what they could of their gardens and furniture. Long stretches of the streets lay under water. But some families had already started to put up beds and improvised kitchens, and smoke was rising from some chimneys, or what was left of them.

Li Fei and Tantse had had two days of tiring travel and decided to stop on at Shanshan for a day before attempting the difficult and more dangerous stretch to Hami.

31

WHEN PAO REPORTED THAT ON HIS LAST TRIP HE HAD NOT BEEN able to enter Urumchi, Jo-an's whole body seemed to stiffen. She had hoped for the Moslems' entry into Urumchi, and now she dreaded it.

On the day when she celebrated the baby's full month, she did not know that it was the day when Li Fei made his escape. She had been without news about three weeks. Such indirect news as she read in the papers was vague and disturbing, for the reports were mainly of government victories. Continuous re-

ports of victories could only mean that hot battles were going on. There was no clear indication that the campaign of 'punishing' the rebels was going in any one direction. The battle of Sitachiao was properly reported, but Jo-an had no idea where Sitachiao was.

Towards the end of February she could not stand the suspense any longer and went to see Major Beg. To her surprise she learned that Urumchi was under siege and that the Moslems had, a week before, pressed into the heart of the city before being driven out again.

Li Ping had come to Lanchow and brought his mother's invitation to her, as well as gifts for the baby. She did not want to go to Si-an, hoping to get some direct news from the army office.

She said: "I must stay here and wait for news."

Li Ping replied: "You can take a plane with the baby. It will be only two and a half hours to Si-an. Tangma can take the bus back with me."

But Jo-an was firm. The business of buying furs kept Li Ping another week at Lanchow, and he was still hoping that Jo-an would change her mind.

In the first week of March, while Lanchow was still in the grip of the cold weather, Major Beg sent a note enclosing a radio message from Ma Fu-ming's office in Turfan, reporting Li Fei's escape, and stating that he had to wait there until the situation changed. At last, Li Fei was on his way back!

It was the first big news for the last half year since she had heard that Li Fei was in prison. Tears streamed down her face, but they were a different kind of tears now. She buried her baby's face in her neck and cried. "Lansheng, your father is coming home!" And it seemed to her that the child understood and smiled as he nestled peacefully. Li Fei was free. Hugging the baby and pacing her room, patting him to sleep, her legs were stronger and her steps lighter.

She sent Tangma to Li Ping's hotel to tell him the exciting news. Li Ping came to her at once, and Jo-an showed him the radio message. Li Ping bent in thought over the paper in his hand.

"It says he is waiting for the situation to change. It may take months before he can make his way back. I think you do not

have to worry now." He stopped to watch her for a second. "My mother and I feel very grateful for what you have done for my brother. And my mother is very anxious to see her grandchild. We are all of one family. You may feel diffident about coming to Si-an with us, but you have heard of a 'child daughter-in-law'. You needn't be afraid of what the neighbours say."

Jo-an's eyes looked up sharply. "I don't care what the neighbours say."

"Then there is no reason for you not to come. We all want you to be with us. As for news from my brother, they can forward it to Si-an as well as here."

Tangma spoke up. "Jo-an, if Li Fei is free and on the way back, you should go and wait in his home. You have been here long enough. I went through this winter with you, and I want to go home, too. You will be more comfortable, and it will be more like a family. Li Fei will feel better, too. He will worry less on your account."

At last Jo-an's mind was made up. "Your mother is so kind. If your family accept me as their daughter-in-law, I don't care what others say."

When Li Ping was gone, she suddenly felt very tired. The long months of struggle were over and it seemed that she had no more strength to worry about anything. She fell upon her bed and longed for someone to comfort her and take away the burden of waiting. Her eyes turned to the baby, and she sat up and leaned over his crib and said: "Lansheng, we are going home to your grandmother."

* * * * *

Jo-an's mind was confused and her heart shook as she sat in the plane flying to Si-an. Li Ping had put her on the plane and was going back by bus with Tangma to save expense. The heavy luggage was all taken care of by Li Ping, and she brought only a suitcase. With the baby in her arms, she thought of her position. However kind the family might be, she could not escape the feeling of embarrassment. Were they accepting her out of pity? Would they think her immoral? If Tuanerh should ask how it happened, she would die of shame.

She wondered, too, who would come to the airport to meet her, what kind of reception she was going to get when she

entered the door of Li Fei's house, and how she was going to address Li Fei's mother. She wished that the plane would arrive in the dark and nobody would see her and she could slip into the house quickly, and the next morning she could come out of her room with the baby in her arms and say: "Mother, here is your grandchild." She had suggested that Li Ping notify Fan, as she wanted a man to come and help her at the airport. She would not mind Fan at all, and perhaps Lang would come with him; it had never been hard to face these friends of Li Fei's.

When the plane was about to land, she wrapped up her baby carefully and adjusted her hair and her coat. The plane touched the ground with a light bounce. It was five o'clock and the sun was shining. Her heart was pounding fast. She would sit still and let the other passengers leave first. At last, standing at the door above the ladder after everybody had left, she saw Fan ten feet away. She smiled and her courage returned. Fan always was able to break rules and regulations, this time by telling the guards that a young lady was arriving with a baby and he had to go and help her get down.

She stepped down the ladder carefully. Fan was already at the foot to help her.

As she raised her head to look, she saw behind the railing Tuanerh smiling and waving a white handkerchief. Her children were by her side, their hands on the railing. Behind, Jo-an saw the small figure of Li Fei's mother. Tuanerh rushed through the gate to take the baby, and then Ing and Tan and Toi all ran forward to look at the baby, jumping about and laughing.

The mother stood quietly wiping her eyes, and said in a small, quivering voice: "Jo-an, you have come home." The mother stretched out her hand in a clear gesture of welcome and held Jo-an's as she offered it. Something twitched Jo-an's heart. Immediately Tuanerh took the baby to the mother and she held out her arms and received him and bent to kiss him.

"What is the news of my son?" the mother asked, her face grave.

"We have had no further news since that radio message from Turfan."

While she was speaking to the mother, she became suddenly aware of the beautiful eyes of Chunmei looking steadily at her with a smile. She was completely astonished when she also saw

Sianghua, standing with Lang. She forgot all her embarrassment. Why, they were all there!

Chunmei was wearing frizzles over her forehead. Her pleasure at seeing Jo-an again was evident on her face. Sianghua had become very thin, but her face was rouged.

"I heard from Mr. Fan that you were coming," said Chunmei. Then Sianghua and Jushui came up and shook her hands. Jushui, too, had become thinner.

This welcome was a complete surprise to her. Instead of being embarrassed, she had returned with the child and it had made no difference to all her friends.

Now Tuanerh was holding the baby again, while Jo-an walked with the mother. The latter's steps were slow and unsteady, and Jo-an was holding her arm. A sense of exultation came over Jo-an.

When they had come to the exit, Chunmei said: "I have to go home. The old man does not know and I have not told him about your return. I will come over to see you tomorrow when I can get away."

"How is my aunt?" Jo-an asked.

"She is telling rosaries and mumbling prayers all day ever since Second Brother's death."

Sianghua was starting to say good-bye, too, but Jushui said: "I am going with them. Why don't you come, too?"

"I will. I would like to talk to Jo-an."

The long procession of rickshaws soon arrived at Li Fei's home. Jo-an stepped down with the baby in her arms. As she went through the small gate, she felt like walking in a dream. She had indeed dreamed of entering this house as a bride, but with Li Fei by her side. She knew that this was her home, that it was here she belonged.

Flowers were on the table in the parlour. Quickly the mother showed her Li Fei's room, where a baby bed with clean white sheets was ready. The room was well heated with a brazier. Jo-an put the baby in the crib and threw off her red coat. In bending down to tuck the baby in, she intentionally displayed the gold bracelet the mother had given her. Then she sank into a chair with a lump in her throat.

"Jo-an, this is your home," Mrs. Li said.

"Mother!" Jo-an cried without thinking.

Out in the parlour the talk was incessant. Everybody wanted to ask Jo-an questions. The girl Ing, who was at first shy, came to stand by Jo-an, and the younger children remembered her and acted as if she had done something wonderful and great to come home with a baby. Among all those present, only the children saw the event in its true natural light. They had not ceased to wonder and to feel that for a girl to come home with a baby was a great and wonderful and mysterious event, which it was.

Jo-an expressed to Sianghua her sympathy for Tsujen's death.

"I am planning to go back to Shanghai," said Sianghua quietly.

"I am persuading her to stay in Si-an," said Jushui.

Fan sent a silent look across to Jo-an.

"I am living now at the Tafuti," said Sianghua. "I have given up the house. You ought to come and see your court again."

"You know that I can't. I am forbidden. How is it in the home?"

"Empty and dreary and boring as usual. The old man has been feeling very badly since Tsujen's death. He is too old to attend to the business. I hardly see a smile at meal-time. My mother-in-law is taking refuge in Buddhism and has nuns come to her room. You would have thought the family had fallen under some curse. When May comes, I am going to get away."

She rose to go and Jushui said he would go with her. When they were out of the house, Jo-an said to Fan: "Jushui seems even quieter than before."

"It was very hard for him," Fan replied. "He has brought O-yun's coffin back and buried her just outside the city."

A question came to Jo-an's tongue, but she checked it. Fan said: "He is seeing a lot of Sianghua these days. Sorrow has brought them together. I am encouraging Jushui to see her. It did him no good to sit at home and mope the whole time."

"And how does Sianghua feel?"

"I think she likes him. They seem suitable for each other. They are just about the same age and they like the same things. Tsujen's death did not seem to hurt her very much."

"She never cared very much for him. She told me."

"It may be better for them both to forget the past," said Fan briefly.

He stood up to leave. He said if there was anything she wanted, she could always call him.

A simple but solid home dinner had been prepared. Jo-an saw wine-cups on the table.

"I do not know what is the proper thing to do," said the mother. "This is your first dinner as daughter-in-law of our family. I have prepared a little wine just for the idea. We will celebrate when Fei returns."

"Mother"—Jo-an said mother very naturally—"I am so happy just to be home." She was glad that there were just the mother and Tuanerh and the children. She had known it would be like this, just a simple family where the mother-in-law was kind, and the presence of children somehow made the atmosphere warmer and easier.

The mother raised her cup and said: "To you and also to Fei's return." Then she added: "I will see that Fei always remembers what he owes to you."

Tuanerh smiled. "Fei will not need to be reminded."

"I don't know how to say things. But that is what I mean. He must always remember."

Jo-an said: "I only did what my heart told me to do."

"I am glad that he found a girl like you. You will be a great help to Fei and my mother's heart is pleased. As for what others say, I will tell them that you were married in Lanchow before he went away."

After supper the three children demanded to see the baby again before they went to bed. While the two elder ones stood by and looked, Toi was so interested in the little brother that he would not leave him and had to be pulled away. The mother-in-law asked Jo-an if she had enough milk, and Jo-an answered: "Yes."

"That is a great comfort. We will cook you some *tangkuei* for milk."

Jo-an did not want to breast-feed the baby in front of the family as most Chinese mothers do. This was her first night and she felt shy, and she sat and waited until the mother-in-law left.

That night she slept in Li Fei's bed. It made her feel like a married woman, a part of the family.

By the time Li Ping returned with Tangma to Si-an, Jo-an

had got used to the situation, so that there was less embarrassment in sitting at the same table with him. Moreover, the day before they arrived, Jo-an received a telegram forwarded from the Division office and long delayed.

AM LEAVING TURFAN IN SAFE COMPANY OF TANTSE. SHOULD BE NO DIFFICULTY IN REACHING HAMI. MAY OR MAY NOT BE ABLE TO SEND YOU NEWS FROM HAMI. KEEP IN TOUCH WITH HAKIM. LOVE TO ALL.

It was signed by Li Fei himself!

The news excited the family greatly and provided many topics for speculation. Where was Hami? Who was Tantse? Who was Hakim? The family had never quite understood the connections. The mention of Tantse heartened Jo-an especially, because she knew that Tantse was close to Hakim, and that meant Li Fei would be travelling with the help and facilities of the Thirty-Sixth Division.

* * * * *

The afternoon after Jo-an's arrival, Chunmei had come to call on her. She did not come empty-handed, but brought a small jade pendant for the baby.

"Does my uncle know I have come home?" asked Jo-an.

"Yes, I have told him." Chunmei stopped and Jo-an understood that she was not forgiven yet. Then Chunmei added: "In time he will forget all this."

"I don't miss anything," Jo-an said proudly.

"I want to tell you that your father's tomb has been made since you left. Of course you will go to see it. Chingming is not far away. We put your name on the tombstone, but there is a space left for the son-in-law which can be filled in later."

"I understand Sianghua has moved in now."

"Yes. She is living at the court in front of yours. Sometimes she has food sent to her court because she feels freer and there is so little talk at the dinner-table. The old man is silent most of the time. It is dreary in the house. She is planning to go south. I am the only person who cannot get away. I do what I can, eat my rice and attend to the family affairs. Sianghua does not take interest in the family business. Her mind, as we say,

turns outward. The old man is angry with her for not wearing the white of mourning for a whole year. But she does not care. She took it off after three months and says that modern women don't observe these customs any more. Of course I don't think she ever cared much for her husband."

"Isn't it true that she is seeing a great deal of Lang?"

Chunmei smiled. "You have found out a lot in one day. This is a matter of the heart. If she chooses to remarry, nobody can stop her. My way of looking at it is this: when a young widow wishes to change her life, she has the right to. Even in the old days, the emperor himself could not force a widow to stay unmarried. It's got to be voluntary; that is why it was so honoured. And Second Brother was not a *shiutsai* or *chujen*; he was educated like a foreigner. I don't think his spirit would be offended if Sianghua remarried. You can see the family dissolving already, and Second Brother did not even have a son to keep up the altar fire. What do you think the family will come to when the old people are gone?"

"Why is my uncle so despondent?"

"Things are not going well. When Tsujen died it was a great blow to him. The business is being run by the employees, and none of them can be trusted. Last New Year's Eve I heard that so many accounts could not be collected. I sent for the manager and questioned him. But it was just to let him know that he must not try to get away with too much. I am a young woman and cannot go to the office and check everything. What worries the old man is what is happening at Sunganor."

"What is happening?" Jo-an inquired, with lively interest.

"After Second Brother was killed I tried to persuade the old man to let the dam alone. The lake brought him money, but in the end he paid with the life of his own son. You may consider me superstitious, but I believe a big lake like that must be controlled by a spirit. Perhaps the lake spirit was displeased. He would not like to have his lake course chopped up like that. But the old man would not listen. The dam was Second Brother's idea and the old man seemed to think that Tsujen had sacrificed his life on account of it and he insisted on having it restored and asked for soldiers from Changshien to guard it. Then two of the soldiers disappeared and the others fled. I suspect they were murdered by the Mohammedans. The old

man thinks so, too, and wrote to the magistrate to take some action. The magistrate refused and said he would not send more soldiers into that hostile territory to be murdered. He couldn't prosecute the case because there were no corpses and no witnesses. So the dam has been left there half completed, and I hear that more and more of the hampers of boulders have broken down. The old man is worrying about his fish. He is thinking of building a dam of concrete so that no one can tear it down and it will not need to be guarded. Do you agree with me that there is no use trying to defy the spirits of the lakes and mountains? If you offend the gods, you are punished for it, no matter how clever you are. Am I right?"

"You are right. I wonder that the old man never thinks of our Mohammedan neighbours in the valley. Chunmei, I will tell you frankly what I feel. There may or may not be spirits of lakes and rivers, but it cannot offend the gods to let our neighbours have water for their fields. My father told me and Li F'ei on the day we were betrothed that the Sunganor estate would be unsafe to live in unless we made the Moslem neighbours our friends. My father owned half of the lake. My uncle may try to disinherit me, but the name of Tu is mine as well as his, and I do not want the people of the valley to curse the Tu family name. All my aunt's mumblings of the Buddha's name will not help him against the wrath of the Mohammedans."

"If you can stop your uncle or make him change his mind, you will be doing more than I can. Men think they are cleverer than women. They won't listen to us."

Jo-an detected a tone of resentment in Chunmei's voice.

"Would you have the dam torn down if you had your way?" Jo-an asked.

"I would. That is what I have been trying to say."

"Then at least you and I and my father agree."

32

AT THE FOOT OF THE TIENSHAN MOUNTAIN, ON THE MAIN ROAD between Turfan and Hami, lay the little village of Chiktam consisting of about one hundred families. The village streets

formed a kind of mud paste mixed with yellow sand which came in from the desert and settled in the dust-bowl leading to the Turfan basin. Ox-carts had driven deep ruts into the road. The men were restless. The group of Turki soldiers from Sunganor, gaunt and tattered and muddy, looked as grey as the vast stretch of sand dunes which lay on the east. They had been here for about a month. As they sloshed about in the streets, the mud sucked their soft leather boots, making their steps heavy, as if they were treading on molasses.

A week ago they had watched the Chinese and Mongol soldiers pass through the village when they evacuated Shanshan and went northward. Sullenly and defiantly the Turakis watched, as the Chinese troops, sad-faced and as tired as themselves, filed past in a straggling column. The Turakis were standing on the side of the street. They and the enemy stared wearily at each other, and the Chinese troops passed by, in the way woodcutters and tigers have been known to pass each other, entirely disinterested when the tigers are well-fed. The Turakis were neither afraid of a skirmish nor anxious for it. They had been killing each other to satiety. They didn't have to tell each other they were enemies, nor was there any pretence that they were friends. Here at Chiktam, Chinese and Mohammedan soldiers had passed and repassed, and the inhabitants had fled and returned, and fled again.

The Chinese captain bringing up the rear took out a cigarette and approached Rahman, a tall, bearded Turki.

"Have you a light?"

Rahman took out a match and lighted it for him, and asked: "Can you spare a cigarette?"

He had three left, and politely offered one.

"Where are you going?" asked Rahman.

"Up to Kitai.* Shall we see you there?"

"Perhaps."

The Chinese captain laughed and caught up with his troops.

To the north the distant bluish-white glaciers of Tienshan shone in the sun. The road led into a wall of bluish cliffs which rose sharply from the low plains. To the south the country lay

* Kitai, halfway between Chikoching and Urumchi, is the ancient city from which the name Cathay came. Locally it is referred to among the Chinese as Kuchengtse, or Ancient Town.

in low bare hills, with many winding canals and wooden bridges and willow groves.

The group of Turki soldiers was now huddled in the inn, with its doors open in front. Looking across a bare table, Tantse pointed to the distant yellowish-grey belt of sand dunes in the east, and said to Li Fei: "We will take that way to Hami. We can make it in four or five days. It is only about one hundred and twenty miles, mostly over sand dunes and some grassy plots overgrown with reeds and brush. That is the way I came."

"How are we going to get food to eat?" asked Rahman, one leg on the bench.

"There are several places to stop. A few miles to the south there is a river. We can just follow the river down to Yur, and then we are there."

Up the highway to Chikochung (Seven-cornered Well) the road was closed in by mountains where they might encounter Chinese troops. They did not know anything of the state of affairs between Chikochung and Hami. Tantse supposed the Chinese troops would be coming that way. The road across the sandy country on the borders of the Gobi would be harder walking, but it would be free of soldiers.

The men were anxious to get started. Their spirits were high and they had the papers of honourable discharge which Tantse had obtained from Ma Fu-ming. About twenty men had come from Sunganor and twelve of them were left to return to their homes.

"We will all stop at Hochow for a good time," said Abdull' Apak as he took his papers. He was tall and lanky and was wearing a pair of new boots that he had taken from a dead man. Few of them, as a matter of fact, had not had a change of clothing. Rozi, a lad of eighteen, was wearing a fur-lined coat which came below his knees, two sizes too big for him, but of good fur and fairly new.

When they set out the sky was a turquoise blue and the weather had turned mild. By war-time standards, the oddly assorted group of men were well-provided and well-armed. Each carried a broad scimitar, curved outward at the end, and they had ten rifles between them. Aqil carried a frozen deer which Rahman had shot three days ago. It was good, mirthful

company for Li Fei, the company of men trudging on their way home.

After four days and four nights along the sandy route, they arrived at Hami. Li Fei remembered the night when he had fled from the city in the dark. For the first time now, he saw the beautiful country. The Moslem city, about a mile west of the Chinese city, lay like a gaunt skeleton of roofless houses and toppling walls. But a vast stretch of fertile plains, dotted with vineyards and cotton-fields and pasture land, lay at the foot of the hills to the south.

As Tantse had expected, the Chinese troops had already departed westward. The Chinese shopkeepers were nervous and half of their shops were closed. Hami was in a military vacuum with no army in control. The radio station and the staff of the telegraph office were gone. The post office was still functioning.

Li Fei went to the Eurasia office and made inquiries about the pilot Pao, and was informed that he would return on the following Wednesday. He had less than half the money needed to cover the flight to Lanchow, and bookings were heavy. The plane came in loaded with passengers flying from Europe to Shanghai. It looked as if he would have a month to wait. Very few passengers got off at Urumchi or Hami, and usually only four or five seats were available.

Li Fei went back to the inn in Tehsheng (Victory) Street, a few blocks from the Eurasia office. He wrote a long letter home asking his brother to buy a ticket for him in Si-an and have it sent by air mail. On the third day, however, the telegraph office re-opened, and he sent a message by wire, giving his address.

It was already April. Tantse and Rahman's party had gone ahead with a camel caravan on the ten-day journey across the desert. While the trail was possible, the desert was subject to fearful hurricanes in spring, when many travellers lost their way.

The following week he got a telegram from his brother, telling him that his ticket had been paid for and he was to arrange a booking at the airline office. He was greatly relieved to be told that Jo-an was already with his family. He had now a comfortable sense of security and of being in touch with his family once more. He sent a telegram to Hakim, thanking him for all his assistance, and was able to see Pao the following

Wednesday. With his help, he was promised a reservation to fly in the first week of May. This done, he spent the month waiting and writing stories for his newspaper.

It was spring and the city of Hami, with a normal population of twenty thousand, had already begun to resume its usual business life. Having heard that the fighting had shifted to the Kitai-Urumchi area, even the Mohammedans returned to their homes. Li Fei had plenty of time on his hands. This was the only month he had in Sinkiang when he was not in trouble and his mind was at peace. The beautiful Subash Lake lay just outside the city, with its long curving banks and its two pavilions, connected with the shore by willow-covered embankments. When the day was calm, its water reflected the peaks, while from the middle of the lake one had a panoramic view of the Chinese and Moslem towns.

In the middle of April he heard that at the darkest hour for the government the siege of Urumchi had been lifted by the unexpected arrival of seven thousand Manchurian troops, who had travelled by way of Siberia and had been permitted by Russia to enter the province. The Moslems were again driven to the mountains. Then, a few days later, he heard that Governor Chin had been driven out by his own officers.

Li Fei had seen the fall of the curtain on the first act of a great human drama, yet he was conscious of a greater human drama enacted at home during his absence, of which he was the cause and in which he had been saved by the strength of one woman. He had always had a doubt about the great class of scholars and writers who, for the most part, dealt with words, repeating what others had said before, and beat their futile wings on the air of abstract discussion as an excuse for their personal inability to deal with life. Now he had learned a deep lesson about women, that women had a greater strength to cope with the adversities of life, that such life was going on around him all the time, and those who played with abstract problems often missed the small and the real ones, and that he, a man and supposedly a writer, had played a ridiculously small rôle.

With such thoughts in his mind, he boarded the plane in the first week of May. Ma Chungying was just starting his dash across the Hami desert to renew his bid for leadership of the Moslem world in a war which was to spread over the whole of

Sinkiang until he was defeated by bombs dropped by Russian aeroplanes.

The plane took off at eight o'clock in the morning. It ran into a thunderstorm and was two hours late at Lanchow. It was not expected to land at Si-an until eight o'clock.

It had been drizzling all day in Si-an. Low, dark clouds bumped along in the sky, and it was completely dark when the plane came in. The Li family had planned to meet Li Fei at the airfield, but in the late afternoon the drizzle had changed into light showers. It was decided that the mother and Tuanerh should stay at home to get dinner ready, while Li Ping went with Jo-an to meet him.

Fan and Lang came to take them to the airport in a car. A little before eight o'clock they heard the drone of the aeroplane overhead. There were low-flying clouds and the plane could not land. The drone stopped and the plane seemed to have gone away. After some twenty minutes it was heard again above the clouds. There were high peaks of the Taipo mountain south of the city, and the pilot was taking no chances. The hide-and-seek game between the plane above the clouds and the people below went on for forty minutes. Jo-an was almost exhausted with the suspense. Finally the pilot was able to locate Hsienyang some twelve miles away, marked by the railway bridge across the Wei River, and he flew straight in.

Jo-an was standing with Fan and Lang near the railing. She was wearing her black satin gown and the red scarf in which she had met Li Fei at the tea-house over a year ago. She still had the slim girlish figure, though on her face there was the new lustre which Nature gives to mothers during the period of breast-feeding. All her waiting and the hardships of separation were over. This day was the day of her triumph.

In the searchlights of the airfield Li Fei's tall, thin, muscular figure was seen to emerge from the doorway of the plane, his face smiling and his eyes looking about. It was dark where they stood and his eyes facing the light could not see them. Lugging a suitcase, he approached the gate. He heard Jo-an's voice crying: "Fei! Fei!"

Before he knew it, she had flung herself on him. He felt the up-surge of a great emotion as he held her close. He lifted her face up to look into it in the dim light and murmured "Jo-an".

Her eyes were misty, but her face was turned up, smiling at him. He bent and their lips touched and would not part again for a long moment, until the thirst for each other had been quenched for the time being. She clung to him, and as he felt the touch of her body, he knew that the love that tied them together had made them as one body and one soul. Fan and Lang stood back leaving them alone until Jo-an, faint with the hot breath in her throat, raised her head and said: "Your brother and Jushui and Wenpo are here."

Fan and Lang and Li Ping stepped forward to greet Li Fei heartily, if less demonstratively.

"Where is the baby?" Li Fei asked.

"He is at home. It is raining and I thought it better not to take him out."

Wenpo and Jushui said they wanted to leave Li Fei alone with his family, but they would call after dinner.

Li Ping's children were at the door and greeted the arrival with screams. Toi tugged at Li Fei's trousers, demanding to be recognised, and he bent down and took the little fellow in his arms. Then he quickly stepped forward and hugged his mother's shaking body. She looked up at him and said: "Fei, you are looking well. You are not wounded or anything?"

"No, Mother, I am safe and sound. I had a month's good rest at Hami."

"How you kept us worried for a whole year!"

"I won't go away again, Mother, you may be sure of that. I have caused you and Jo-an enough trouble." His words were simple, curiously without his usual effervescence. Down in his heart, he felt humble before these two women.

Tangma brought in the baby and Jo-an took him and held him for his father to see, pride in her eyes. "He is only four months old and he can already smile," she said.

Li Fei took the baby and started to kiss him, but, frightened by the stranger, he began to cry and Jo-an happily took him back.

At dinner Jo-an and Li Fei sat together on one side, and Tuanerh and the elder brother sat on the other side, while the mother sat at the top. Li Fei was inclined to be quiet, looking at Jo-an all the time. It was she who did most of the talking. Her eyes were brighter than usual.

"Fei, you have not yet thanked Mother for taking me into your home."

"I want to," said Li Fei in a voice consciously low and restrained. He was struggling with emotions which overwhelmed him. Raising a cup, he said: "I thank Mother for inviting Jo-an to come here. I thank you all. As for Jo-an, I need not say anything. Let us all drink to Jo-an."

The mother cleared her throat. "My son, I want to say something before all the family. When you went away, Jo-an followed you to Lanchow to be nearer you. She was expecting the baby and she went through many bitter days on your account. She did not tell me and bore it all alone. It was she who located you, found friends to see you and sent you money and clothing. You are lucky to have such a constant wife. I want you to remember this. She has suffered enough. You must love her and protect her and make her happy now. If anything ever comes up between you two, as often happens between young couples, I want you to be kind to her and yield to her. Then you will please your mother."

"Mother," replied the son. "I am deeply aware of what Jo-an has done and has gone through. What you say is the easiest thing for me to do. You shall see."

"Then drink this cup," said the mother.

Tuanerh poured the wine into Jo-an's and Li Fei's cups, and they drank to each other. And then the family drank to them, like congratulating bride and bridegroom.

"This is like the wedding cup," said Li Fei.

Tuanerh broke into a smile. "But you were married!" she exclaimed.

"Was I?"

His mother and his brother were all smiles.

"There were witnesses, too," continued Tuanerh.

He turned to Jo-an and asked: "What is this?"

Jo-an said simply: "You will see."

Li Fei said no more, thinking that perhaps Jo-an had told them something which she had had no time to explain to him.

After dinner, Jushui and Wenpo came in. Lungyen tea was served.

Half an hour later, Chunmei and Sianghua came, and now Li Fei was really surprised.

"They were invited to come," Jo-an whispered.

After the greetings to Li Fei, Chunmei was shown a special chair, and Sianghua took a seat next to Jushui. Chunmei looked around the room and said: "I thought you would light two red candles."

"I will bring them," said Li Ping.

Li Fei glanced from Chunmei to Jushui and Wenpo and looked a little foolish. While Tuanerh brought out cups of lungyen tea for Chunmei and Sianghua, Li Ping came out of the room with two big red candles, placed them on the high table, and lighted them.

"What is this?" Li Fei asked.

"You will see."

Fan asked Chunmei: "Have you brought your seal?"

"Of course I have."

Fan drew out of his sleeve a roll of paper tied with a red ribbon. Slowly he went over to Li Fei, unrolled the scroll and said: "Look at this. You were married when you did not know it."

Li Fei's eyes opened wide and then his face broadened into an amused smile. It was a regular wedding certificate, with a red border of a dragon-and-phoenix design, dated August 5, 1932, at Lanchow. Besides the names of the bridegroom and the bride, there were those of the presiding officer (*cheng-hunjen*), Fan Wenpo; the representative of the bride's family (*chuhunjen*), Tu Chunmei; the representative of the bridegroom's family, Mrs. Li the mother; witnesses Lang Jushui and Mr. Tsui, the father of O-yun. Beneath these names, written in ink, the personal seals of the parties had been stamped—all except those of the bridegroom and of Chunmei.

"This is our gift and your mother's gift to you and Jo-an," said Fan. "In the absence of Jo-an's father, we thought we should ask Chunmei to sign on behalf of the bride's family, according to seniority."

"I don't understand," said Li Fei, gasping in surprise. "I was not in Lanchow on that day. I had left three months before."

"That is a mere formality. Nobody will question it. Jo-an has placed her seal here already. You see your mother's name and Chunmei's name are followed by the word *pu*, which means that they gave their consent, but were not able to attend the

ceremony and that the seal was placed afterwards. In your case, we cannot say that the bridegroom was not physically present."

Li Fei looked at Jo-an, who was studying him with wistful amusement. "It is a wonderful idea," he shouted enthusiastically. "You women seem to have all the ideas."

"Not this time," Jo-an replied. "It was Wenpo's suggestion and Mother insisted on it. This may be the first case of a wedding where the bridegroom was not physically present."

Li Fei went into his room and came out happily with his small ivory seal. The certificate was placed squarely on the high table below the red candles. While the others stood looking, Li Fei carefully placed his seal under it.

He then stood aside and Chunmei took out her seal and stamped it below her name.

As he turned around he saw Tuanerh coming out of the bedroom with his mother. Both of them had changed. His mother was dressed in a deep purple satin jacket and had put on a pleated skirt over her trousers. Li Fei knew then what he was expected to do.

The mother was guided to a chair and placed beside the table. Without being told, Li Fei sought Jo-an's hand and then went and stood before his mother. Li Ping and his family crossed to one side, while Chunmei and the others stood on the other. Wenpo stepped slightly in front as the master of the ceremony. He sang, "First Bow", "Second Bow", and "Third Bow" successively while Li Fei and Jo-an performed the ceremony.

The mother's eyes dwelt on the young people fondly and she wiped a tear from her eye, thinking of Li Fei's father and feeling that her duty as a parent was now done.

Fan sang again for the couple to thank the 'relatives' on one side and the 'guests' on the other.

"We have stood on the wrong side," said Chunmei to Sianghua. "We are not guests."

"It does not matter," said Fan.

Chunmei stepped up to Jo-an and said: "I am honoured to represent the Tu family and take the place of your father. I know that he approved of this marriage and we are carrying out his wish. Sianghua is leaving us soon, and I shall be a *laotaipo* (old woman) myself. You must come over to visit your maiden home."

"I am happy here and I won't go," Jo-an replied.

When they were seated, Chunmei spoke again.

"You mustn't be too simple-minded. The old man forbade you to come home, and you let him have his way. You come. The house is yours. What can the old man do? Besides, you are now formally married. The other day I spoke to popo about your return. Certainly she won't interfere. I don't like the presence of the nuns in the house. They come every two or three days to mumble prayers. They make the house dismal. And now Sianghua is going to Shanghai, and it will be more dreary than ever. You will be doing me a favour if you come and visit us instead of my running to see you." Turning to Li Fei, she said: "What do you think? Am I right?"

Li Fei looked at Jo-an and she said: "I have no wish to go there. It is so unpleasant."

"Third Aunt," Chunmei addressed Jo-an formally in the presence of the others, "I have seen enough of life. Sometimes you don't get things unless you take them. Your father's things are still there. Your grandfather's library is there and the ancestral portraits are there. But now, especially after you are married, the old man can't forbid you to come. For the sake of the Tu family, I am asking you to visit us and consider it still as your maiden home. If you don't fight for your father's rights, who will?"

"What your saotse says is right," Li Fei said. "You had better take her advice."

"You must come and see me, anyway," said Sianghua.

"When will you be leaving?" Jo-an asked.

"We were only waiting for Fei's return. Jushui has kindly offered to go with me to Shanghai, but he wouldn't leave until he and Fei had a chance to see each other."

"If you want to attend the wedding of your friend, you had better go to Shanghai," Chunmei said to Li Fei. He looked at Jushui, who nodded his head.

Li Fei smiled. "Not even Jushui's wedding can make me leave home again. But you must come back after the wedding."

After the party left and Li Fei and Jo-an retired to their room, they felt as though this was indeed their wedding night.

BEFORE JUSHUI AND SIANGHUA LEFT IN THE FOLLOWING WEEK, Jo-an and Li Fei went to see Sianghua in her court. Tu Fanglin was angry that his son's widow was so defiant of old custom as to be already talking of remarriage hardly six months after Tsujen's death. He was all the more mortified that the Tu money had no power to keep his widowed daughter-in-law at home. Sianghua had frankly said that she did not want any of her husband's money.

Jo-an was persuaded by Chunmei to go over to the main court and pay her respects. Chunmei had prepared her uncle, and told Jo-an that, as one of the younger generation, it was her duty to take the first step. It was a cold reception as they had expected, brief and formal, and Jo-an came away from seeing her uncle and aunt with a frightening feeling. Something seemed to have gone out of Tu Fanglin. The pouches under his eyes sagged in deep furrows and the skin of his fleshy face hung loose. Aunt Tsaiyun's hair had turned more white than grey.

About ten days later Chunmei called up on the telephone to say that she was going to Sunganor.

"Your uncle is going there to settle the affair about the dam," she said. "He is determined to go."

"And you are going with him?"

"Ycs. I must go with him and see if some sort of arrangement cannot be worked out. There must be some way to compromise."

Jo-an told Li Fei, and he said: "Your uncle will run into a hornets' nest."

A week passed and Li Fei brought Fan home for dinner, and after dinner he talked about the trouble he was expecting at Sunganor.

"I came over the desert to Hami with those returning soldiers from Sunganor, and I got to know them quite well. I don't think Rahman and Aqil and Abdull' Apak are in a temper to take it lying down when they see the dam going up again."

Fan's eyes were grave. "And your uncle has gone to restore the dam?" he asked Jo-an.

"Yes."

"I think he will take some soldiers," said Li Fei.

Jo-an said: "Chunmei didn't say whether he was taking soldiers. She said she would try to see if a compromise can be worked out. That is why she has gone with him."

Fan Wenpo almost leaped from his seat. "She has gone?"

"Yes. She has been gone for about a week. She wanted to prevent my uncle from doing anything rash."

"Do you know what this means?" Fan's voice was hoarse. He turned to Li Fei. "One of us must go. Heaven knows what might happen to her when the fighting starts. Fei, you know those soldiers. We must do something."

"Fei is not going this time," said Jo-an. "Excuse me for being selfish. But I am concerned about Chunmei. Can't we send a message?"

Fan crushed his cigarette.

"It is unfair of me to ask Fei to go away on your honeymoon. Both of you know the Moslems. If you will write a note, I will see that they get it. I am ready to go myself."

"You yourself?" Li Fei asked.

"That is the best way—not to depend on anybody else."

"A note from me to Tantse asking him to protect Chunmei will be enough," said Jo-an. "Fei, you write to Rahman and explain that Chunmei has gone to take their side and restrain my uncle. We must make that very clear, that she is their friend."

Fan said: "I will take the letters and see Hijaz. He remembers me."

That very night, Fan came for the letters and took the train to Paochi. He reached Sunganor two days later and at once went to Hijaz. He did not try to see Chunmei because he did not want to meet Tu Fanglin.

"I brought a letter for Tantse from Jo-an. Is the situation quiet around here?"

Hijaz roared. "Quiet! Disquietingly quiet."

From the porch of Hijaz's house Fan looked down on the dam. It stretched for about sixty or seventy feet, supported by concrete posts forming a straight line in the centre, but curved

inward on both ends. Water was coming over a big gash in the middle and several small breaches on the sides. Barrels of concrete were piled on the bank together with some wooden caissons. They had come during the last three days, Fan was told. Two soldiers were on guard. The villagers had been informed that a permanent dam, made entirely of concrete, was going to be built, replacing the baskets of boulders. There were six soldiers at the lake, taking turns, and more were to come when the construction began.

Hijaz said: "Soldiers will only make matters worse. Azal went over the other day to speak with Tu and plead for an arrangement. At this level, the valley is still getting some water, enough to keep the farms going. I admit that our people have been lifting a boulder here and another there to widen the breach or help it widen itself. But we are satisfied if the present level is maintained."

"What did Tu say?"

"Azal came away without any commitment. Tu said the lake was his property and his fish business depended on it, and he would do what he liked with it."

"Did Azal see a young woman there?"

"Yes. She is his daughter-in-law, I was told."

"Azal should have talked to her instead of to Tu. There is a wonderful woman who has more sense than any of us."

Fan asked for Tantse. Tantse and Miriam had been married since he came home, and they were staying with Sohrab and his mother. Hijaz sent his grandson to take him there.

Tantse glanced over Jo-an's and Li Fei's letters.

"Do you come here to mediate?"

"No. I came here only to bring this message from Jo-an, that, in case of trouble, no harm must come to Chunmei."

"I don't know what kind of trouble it is going to be. It depends on the other side. I have seen enough of war and don't want to start one right in my village. I think Jo-an's uncle is mad to bring soldiers here. It is just the thing to provoke us. And what is the use of a concrete dam? Fifty pounds of dynamite will blast a big hole in it, and dynamite is what we have. Abdull' Apak and Rahman are getting restive. Some of us want to wait until the dam is completed and then blast it with dynamite. They cannot guard the place the year round. Others are

for going out and stopping the construction now, The villagers are sullen. When the work starts, any little incident may provoke a brush with the soldiers."

Fan told him about Li Fei's return and the wedding ceremony, and Tantse was keenly interested.

"Jo-an and her father are our friends. I will do anything for her, except to help save her uncle."

"This Chunmei is also your friend. She completely agrees with Jo-an and is against the dam. She came here to plead for your people. Will you promise this and speak to your men about it?"

"I give you my word that I will personally see that no harm comes to her. Will you be stopping here?"

"I am stopping just for a day to see the situation. I shall be at Hijaz's house."

That afternoon the villagers reported that a dozen Chinese soldiers were seen coming over the eastern ridge. Azal, the priest, went in mid-afternoon to have another interview with Tu at the Sunganor house and to beg him to withdraw the soldiers. Azal argued without avail. Tu would not be intimidated. The soldiers were given quarters at the fishermen's village.

It was already dusk when Azal returned by boat. Passing by the bank, he stood to look at the piles of concrete barrels.

"What are you doing here?" a soldier challenged.

"I am passing by," replied the old priest.

Azal strolled on, counting the barrels.

The soldier clutched him by the shoulder. Azal shook him off and walked on.

"Stop!" shouted the soldier. Another soldier ran and blocked his path.

"We have orders to let no one come near here."

Azal pushed the second soldier aside, but they clutched his shoulders and spun him round.

"You had better come with us," said one of them.

Azal resisted, but he was overpowered. His hands were tied behind his back and he was put in the boat. As they were getting into the boat, some villagers saw them.

The news of the priest's arrest ran like wildfire through the village. Hijaz rose from his divan. The wrath that shook his

huge frame was terrible to see. "If Azal does not return in an hour, there will be bloodshed."

Dark figures were seen running up the valley. Nusaryi and the children were trembling with fear. Soon Abdull' Apak appeared in the garden. On his shoulder swung a rifle.

"The men are gathering," he said. "They will muster at the square in half an hour. We may as well stop this now as later."

Hijaz walked to the square and Fan followed him. A black mass of men and women were cursing and shouting in the dark. Rahman came, followed by Tantse and five others, all on horseback, broadswords gleaming at their belts. Some seventy other men came armed with hoes and knives and spears.

"We will wait another half-hour yet to see if Azal comes back," said Rahman. "If not, there is no choice but to rescue him. The thing to do is to block the soldiers' escape. We will go up the pine grove on the ridge. It is better to steal down the ridge and strike them in the dark. We have thirty horses here. Some of our men will go up the other ridge and block their escape in the east, others will attack the house and the village and search for Azal. We will teach them a lesson. No Chinese soldiers will dare to appear in Sunganor again."

A few stars were winking over the dark valley. Above, the wind was whistling through the pine forest. Two men who had gone up to watch for any sign of Azal's return were coming down the steep trail.

"There is no sign of any movement. Lights are shining in some of the cottages and in the Sunganor house."

It was decided to wait until midnight. The party of eighty men was organised and weapons distributed. There was a good two hours' waiting yet. Some men tied their horses and sat on the ground and built a fire. Others went home to sharpen their knives and swords. Sentries were sent up the steep ridge to watch the lights of the other side. The lights in the fishing village had gone out, but the windows of the Sunganor house showed that the occupants had not yet gone to sleep.

Fan went up to the men around the fire and spoke to Tantse about rescuing Chunmei.

"Don't worry. I am leading the party that will attack the house. I have told my men to look for her and bring her here."

"What are you going to do with Tu?"

Tantse clicked his tongue and the whites of his eyes gleamed in the light of the crackling fire. "That will be decided by his fate. I have an idea that he is going to resist, and I don't like to interfere with fate."

In the silence of the starlit night, Apak led the party of horsemen towards the ridge which separated the Moslem hamlet from the Chinese side. Once up the ridge, the ground dropped in a gentle slope towards the south bank. Making their way through the thick brush, the men filed down slowly and noiselessly. All lights were out in the valley below. The distance of three hundred yards to the level ground was easily covered.

On reaching the level, the main party led by Rahman was to surround the village and search for Azal. The horsemen led by Apak were to keep near the outskirts and, as soon as firing began, to gallop up the eastern ridge. A third party, led by Tantse, was to surround the Sunganor house.

A patrol went ahead. Two Chinese sentries were squatting on the quay. "It cannot be helped," said the patrol leader.

When the patrol had come within twenty feet of the first village house, the noise of their movement caught the ears of the sentries, who at once got to their feet and looked wildly about.

The Moslems crept close to the wall of the house and sprang out. There was a scuffle and the two sentries were stabbed, not without letting off a rifle-shot which rent the air.

The other parties knew that no time must be lost and dashed out of the dark immediately. The night resounded with the clatter of horses' hoofs and rushing footsteps.

Tantse led his men up the gravel path towards the house. Before they reached it they heard screams which rang clear in the night, followed by an exchange of shots in the village.

Tu Fanglin was sleeping in the front room of the house. When he heard the first shot, he hastily got up and peered into the valley below. From his window he saw dark running figures. A moment later, a soldier knocked loudly at his door and announced that there were men below. He threw on his gown at once.

Noises of men's footsteps were already heard coming up the path. There were only four soldiers at the house, the rest being

down at the village. The guards who were asleep were just getting out of bed when firing was heard from the porch.

Tu dashed out of his room and called Chunmei. "The Moslems are here! There is fighting. We had better escape through the garden."

A succession of shots went off just outside and the guards fled wildly in all directions.

Chunmei jumped out of bed in her pyjamas. There was no light in the room. Without waiting for Chunmei, Tu Fanglin fled towards the back of the house, just as Tantse ran in with a torch. He lit a lamp and ordered a search of the house.

Chunmei was trembling in a corner when the door opened. A torch caught her cowering near her bed. The man went out and Tantse came in. He lighted the lamp of the table. The light lit up Chunmei's half-clad figure, her big dark eyes wild with fright.

"Who are you?" Tantse demanded.

"My name is Chunmei."

"Put on your gown, and don't be frightened," said Tantse. "Where is Tu?"

"I don't know. He was speaking to me when he heard the shots outside, and then he ran out."

Tantse turned to one of his men and said: "Guard this woman and let no one do her any harm." His voice was strangely calm and steady when he said to Chunmei: "Don't try to escape. This soldier is here to protect you."

He went out to the back of the house, where there was a knot of men.

"Tu has escaped," one of them said. "They are chasing him up the hill."

Behind the house was a slope covered with brush and bamboo and trees. When Tu got out he made a dash for the slope, hoping to get to the ridge. Then he heard shots below and knew that escape that way was blocked, and he began to climb up the low hill at the back. Men were following him and he knew he was surrounded. His only escape would be to climb over the crest and get down on the other side. But he was old and the men were steadily coming closer in increasing numbers. He ran down the slope. The swamp lay before him. There was no other way out. He heard men coming after him. Headlong

he ran in the dark. The ground yielded beneath him and his feet were wet. He tried to pull himself out, but only sank deeper into the mud up to his knees—up to his shoulders. The men heard his pitiful, frantic cries for help. In the dim moonlight they saw 'Tu Fanglin's head slowly sink below the muddy surface, his hands held high and waving frantically before they disappeared.

The men turned back and met Tantse at the crest and told him what they had seen. He went back to the house, and said to Chunmei: "Tu is dead. He drowned in the swamp."

"What are you going to do with me?" said Chunmei, anger in her eyes.

"My name is 'Tantse. Jo-an is your friend, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"She is a friend of mine also. She has sent a friend to ask me to come and protect you. I am taking you to him immediately."

Chunmei's eyes were incredulous. "Who is that friend?"

"His name is Fan. He is down at our village." He drew out of his pocket the letters of Jo-an and Li Fei. Chunmei recognised Jo-an's handwriting and understood enough of it to know that Fan had undertaken this trip to save her.

Down at the village there had been other fighting. The soldiers caught in their sleep had been stabbed silently. Four men who managed to escape were shot down by Apak's men as they approached the foot of the eastern ridge. Unfortunately a few fishermen had been killed in the dark. The priest Azal had been found safe in one of the cottages.

Tantse led Chunmei down the slope. When she was down at the village, he took one of the horses and held it for her.

"I cannot ride," she protested. Lightly he set her on the horse and swung up behind her. Azal rode another horse behind them.

At Hijaz's house Fan was waiting anxiously, talking with Hijaz and his daughter-in-law. His eyes flashed when he saw Tantse coming up the garden. The door was open and by the light from inside he could see the figure of Chunmei riding in front of Tantse. He dashed out to receive him. Tantse slid down from the saddle and held out a hand for Chunmei to lean on, while with the other hand he helped her to slide down, catching her by the waist.

Her heart leaped when she saw Fan. Though she had been told, it was hard to believe that his presence was real.

Tantse said to Fan: "I have kept my word, and brought her safely to you."

There was excitement and bafflement in Chunmei's eyes. The death of Tu Fanglin, her first experience of riding with a man behind her, the almost fantastic appearance of Fan in the Moslem village, and now the interior of a strange Moslem house, with Hijaz and Nusaryi, in her Turki chemise and bloomers and upturned boots, made a total of strange and upsetting impressions to Chunmei.

Nusaryi had prepared horses' milk and raisins and sweet cakes for the guests. It was already half-past one. Fan said to Chunmei: "It must be hard for you tonight. You must have a good rest. Tomorrow we shall go over to see the village and then I shall take you home."

Nusaryi led her into a room. She lay awake, greatly wondering at the change which had come over her life.

She would be the only one left to manage the whole Tu property. Tu Fanglin was dead. Mrs. Tu was ill and took no interest in the affairs of the family. Jo-an was married and Sianghua had already left to be remarried in Shanghai. She had not dreamed that the end would come so quickly, all within a year. She thought of her children, Tsu-en and Tsutseh, still small, and realised that her responsibilities were great. She wondered why some people who were less able than she seemed to get along without having to plan—Sianghua, for instance—while her cares always seemed to multiply. Jo-an had had a struggle and had borne it with great courage, but now it was over and she was living happily with her young husband. She could not help envying them.

The next day she got up early because the house was already full of the noises of men, some in the garden, all talking about what had happened the previous night. Apak and Rahman came to discuss their plans to dynamite the concrete posts of the dam.

After breakfast, Azal and Tantse came. Azal proposed that they should go and bury the corpses.

"What are we going to do?" he asked, glancing from Hijaz to Tantse. "The government is not going to let this matter pass."

Tantse said: "We have done it and we are going to take the consequences. If soldiers come we can fight them all around the lake. Short of a whole army, we can take care of them in these mountains. To the north it is all Moslem territory and to the east the mountains and ravines are ideal for ambush."

Fan had been thinking, and he said: "If I may speak my mind, I should like to offer some suggestions." His deliberate voice commanded their attention, and their faces turned to him.

"The situation is not so bad, in fact it has taken a turn for the better," said Fan. "Tu Fanglin is dead and the Sunganor property is now in the hands of two women who are both your friends. I mean the Elder Tu's daughter Jo-an, and Chunmei here, whom Tantse saved last night. I am sure they both do not want to keep the dam. Jo-an's father wanted to destroy it, anyway. So the cause of all this trouble is gone.

"In the second place, the magistrate sent those soldiers here only under Tu Fanglin's pressure. I am sure he has no desire to send more soldiers to look for more trouble. When we go back, Chunmei and Jo-an can draw up an official petition, as heiresses of Sunganor, informing the magistrate that the affair has already been amicably settled and begging him not to send any more soldiers into this region. It will be very easy to show why such incidents should be stopped immediately and why more of them would cause a spreading Moslem revolt, until we would have a small Chinese-Moslem war in South Kansu, like the Moslem war in Sinkiang. The magistrate will be only too glad, if Jo-an and Chunmei will sign such a petition.

"In the third place, I think you people are unduly worried. You have let a few soldiers, sent from a county government by private request, bully you. You should not deal with the county magistrate. You forget that the governor of this province, Ma Pufang, is a Tungan. Azal should take a journey and lay the matter before Ma Pufang and ask for justice. He is a Moslem. An order from him will settle everything. Don't bother about these small county officials."

As Fan finished, Hijaz's eyes widened and his hands dropped from his chin. Azal's brow was still furrowed, but he stroked his white beard and nodded approval. Nusaryi's deep brown eyes cast a look of admiration. Tantse relaxed and breathed more easily. Chunmei, sitting erect in a corner of the divan,

had been listening attentively. She could not help agreeing with Fan's argument, which had surprised everybody.

"What do you think, Chunmei?" Fan asked. "You are the heiress, with Jo-an. You can speak for yourself."

"I agree with all that Mr. Fan has just said," Chunmei said. "I hope for our own sake that there will be peace in this region. As for the dam, why don't you send people to dynamite it now?"

Azal rose and, touching his hands to his chest and stroking his beard, said to the Chinese woman: "I offer you our friendship. You have nothing to fear from us."

The old priest held out his hand and Chunmei rose and grasped it. "You are a worthy successor to Governor Tu Heng," said Azal. "In his days, it was this kind of handshake between my predecessor and Governor Tu Heng that saved Sunganor." All those who were present marvelled at this simple grasping of hands, which assured the villagers that there would be no more fear of wars ravaging their homes.

Outside, Apak and his men were tying dynamite-sticks to the concrete posts. The whole village turned out to see the operations, just as on the day when Jo-an's father led them to break the dam. Men and women stood at a safe distance to watch the explosion.

At eleven o'clock the blast sent a spray high into the air and rocked the concrete posts and the bundles of boulders loose. They came flying down into the river-bed. A flood poured over the broken dam, to the cheers of the men, women, and children on the bank.

The next day Chunmei and Fan departed from Sunganor. After their arrival at Si-an they told Jo-an and Li Fei of all that had happened, and that there would not even be a funeral for Tu Fanglin's body. Fan helped Jo-an and Chunmei to prepare the petition to the county magistrate. All the steps which he had suggested were taken, and they received a warm letter of thanks from Azal.

* * * * *

July came, and Sunganor was dressed in the full beauty of a mountain resort. Li Fei was paddling a boat, with Jo-an holding the six-month-old baby. Chunmei was on the lake too, with her children, in a boat with Fan.

Fan rowed far out into the middle of the lake. Resting on his oars, he let the boat drift, looking at Li Fei's and Jo-an's boat half a mile away.

"Sunganor is a beautiful place, isn't it," said Fan. "We should come here every summer from now on."

"It is a pity that since I came to the Tu family eleven years ago I have never seen it until this year."

"Why do you still wear the dress of mourning?" he asked.

Chunmei looked sidelong at him. "Why do you ask? It is the custom."

"Because Sianghua wore it only for three months. Customs have changed, you know."

Chunmei was far too clever not to guess what he was implying, but she could not help blushing.

"Three months have not passed yet," she said.

"What do you think of Sianghua's remarriage? I don't believe in those old customs, do you?"

Chunmei bent her head and stroked the hair of Tsutseh and answered: "It all depends."

THE END